(IN)FAMOUS ANGEL: THE CHERUB COMPANY AND THE PROBLEM OF DEFINITION

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the effects of conventionally categorizing working artists and looks specifically at the Cherub Company, London, as a case study. Cherub was an alternative British theatre company whose work in the 1980s defied most of the categories which inscribed theatre practice in Britain. Because they did not fit canonical definitions, Cherub was said to be producing "bad" theatre. When governments, critics or historians use a canonical approach to separate the supposedly good from the bad, artists who do not conform are often ignored and become lost to history. In order to genealogically trace the influence of the Cherub Company and to accurately depict its legacy, this dissertation examines both the company's archive and repertoire as well as the field of cultural production in which it operated. British theatre in the late 1970s was often hostile to foreign performance techniques, led by the opinions of the theatre staff of the Arts Council of Great Britain, the primary issuer of government arts subsidy. Cherub's production of *Two Noble Kinsmen* melded a classic English text with Eastern European production methods and was derided by the ACGB. This response along with similar views on the company's other early productions formed the backbone of the ACGB's contention that Cherub should not receive subsidy. Despite the company's maturation, demonstrated by the international success of their production of *Kafka's THE TRIAL*,

which won a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival, the ACGB continued to refuse subsidy. Eventually the company was selected by the British Council, a government organization whose mission was to send quality British cultural products abroad, for numerous international tours. These tours allowed the company to stay alive during the difficult years of the mid-1980s, though this also meant they were rarely producing in the UK. Ultimately, the company would lose its prominence, and though they continued producing into the new millennium, they never regained their former stature. Cherub's story demonstrates that historiographic impact and importance should not be limited only to those who achieve conventional success, and this dissertation represents a more inclusive and less power-centered model for documenting and writing history.

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To the family genealogists George C. Kalcich and Rudolph Kalcich,
who first ignited my historical curiosity
and my passion for documenting memories.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"Labels are mentally lazy ways by which people assert they know you without knowing you." – Neil DeGrasse Tyson

In the play *Playhouse Creatures* by April de Angelis, Mrs. Farley tells her rival Nell Gwyn that she doesn't meet the necessary standards to be an actress, purportedly basing her argument for quality on a specific set of standards. "I've told you you've got to have the right way about you and you just haven't got it," she tells Nell. Mrs. Farley's definitions for "the right way" for an actress to be are largely based on what she believes are her own best attributes. "You've got to have a bit of breeding," she tells Nell, "Elegance. Class. Dancing." These are all things Mrs. Farley perceives that she has and Nell does not, and she hopes to convince Nell she doesn't have what it takes. Along the way, she redefines the conception of "actress" to allow for Mrs. Farley's own talents to be the basis for distinction. Any talent or skill Nell possesses which does not match Mrs. Farley's is defined as "not right."[1]

As always, the subtext of the scene is more revealing. What Mrs. Farley says is, "the theatre has to have some standards. If it didn't where would we be? Begging or starving." What's underneath that, though, is the fear that if Nell succeeds, Mrs. Farley herself will be back out on the street begging and starving. Her position as a working actress is superior to Nell's position as a wanna-be actress, and Mrs. Farley's success allows her greater power with which to make judgements that matter. Ultimately, though, Mrs. Farley's fears turn out to be prophetic, and Nell Gwyn, in the play as in history, ignores Mrs. Farley's protestations, finds a way to appear onstage and becomes a

legend, to this day outshining Mrs. Farley and nearly every other actress in Restoration England.

In 2003, artistic director Andrew Visnevski and administrator Vi Marriott left the Cherub Company, the theatre company started by Visnevski in 1978. After years of constant uncertainty—never a permanent performance space, constantly changing rehearsal and office space, fluctuating acting company and no government subsidy—they left a company that had always been clear about its mission: the desire "to prove against all current odds that great plays can be made accessible and exciting to a wide audience at comparatively low production costs." Cherub's decisions about what made a "great play" allowed the company to be defined in the minds of audiences, critics, and government representatives. But while Cherub chose its plays and believed that these choices said something very specific about itself and how it should be perceived, the actual perception—the connotation of Cherub in the minds of those outside the company—was significantly different. How Cherub came to be understood in the minds of officials at the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) was only partly based on what Cherub presented. The definition of what "good theatre" is in Britain, formulated within what French anthropologist and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu called "the field of cultural production," connoted Cherub as something wholly different from how it saw itself, and the ACGB used this definition to repeatedly deny Cherub subsidy. After years of living hand-to-mouth and fighting against the way the company was perceived, Visnevski and Marriott had had enough.

De Angelis' play was written in the early 1990s for an alternative theatre company that sought to explore the contemporary conditions for women. As such, De

Angelis utilizes the Restoration to explore the field of cultural production in late twentieth-century Britain, and Mrs. Farley acts as a placeholder for anyone who has gained entrée into the mainstream of the cultural field. She views mainstream success as paramount for her own survival and is willing to do what is necessary to maintain her own position within the mainstream. Undoubtedly, the Cherub Company encountered many Mrs. Farleys as they traversed the British cultural field of the 1980s and '90s. The company's struggle for mainstream acceptance, especially by the funding agencies of the mainstream, offers a clear moment at which to explore the way classification and definition shape theatre production and practice in order to make it "good," but which leave very little room for interpretation or difference. Cherub did seek subsidy, it just – save for one £5000 grant from the ACGB – never received any. Where Nell Gwyn was able to find her way onstage to give people what they apparently wanted, thus earning fame and fortune, Cherub was prevented from doing so. Cherub's onstage work was reinterpreted by the ACGB as something that no one should want, thus ensuring that the company would achieve neither fame nor fortune.

It has become a company with no history, with only a few brief mentions in the scholarly record and an archive of documents that no one wants. This study of the Cherub Company will question the way the company's theatre productions were classified and defined by the cultural field in which it participated. I will show how the company was legitimized by some (audiences and critics) though ignored by more powerful others (the ACGB), thus relegating it to non-existence. I will also illustrate some significant things that historians miss or ignore as they determine or bestow importance upon artists. My examination will utilize Michel Foucault's model of history

as genealogy to determine the influence of the Cherub Company on British theatre and will hopefully be able to craft a more accurate depiction of Cherub's legacy.

Classification Within the Field of Cultural Production

Cherub's work did not exist in a vacuum, and to explore the company's work one must also understand the field of cultural production in which it participated. Bourdieu closely examines the way the field of cultural production works, and he describes the field as something that is an "independent social universe with its own laws of functioning. … To speak of 'field' is to recall that literary works are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws."[2] Bourdieu describes the existence of many fields – the field of power, the field of class relations, and the fields of cultural production – each of varying size with its own hierarchical structure and with its own relationship to the others. Bourdieu describes fields as if they were athletic fields, where individuals enter to participate and where everyone is in competition with everyone else, and the hierarchy within each field is based upon the accumulation of the operating capital of that field. The fields of cultural production – those which produce cultural objects rather than (or in addition to) material goods also "must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy. This is inseparable from the production of the artist or the writer as artist or writer, in other words, as a creator of value."[3]

For Bourdieu, then, within a cultural field, let's say the field of theatre, there are "laws" which govern the activity of the individuals participating, individuals who are

always in competition with each other. These laws both provoke as well as inhibit behavior, and they provide definitions that describe the behavior of the participants and assign those participants capital. Bourdieu examined different types of capital beyond just the economic capital theorized by Karl Marx and others. Generally speaking, Bourdieu considers capital an expression of the means by which an individual gains access or power or property within the field. Economic capital – money – is one type, but Bourdieu also describes cultural and symbolic capital. Within the field of theatre, economic capital undoubtedly has its place, but there are many people existing in the field who have moved up the hierarchy without acquiring economic capital.

Take, for instance, symbolic capital, which Bourdieu describes as "the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability that are easily converted into political positions as a local or national *notable*."[4] Symbolic capital is the power someone obtains from fame, not from fortune. Fortune may result from symbolic capital, but the two can be mutually exclusive and acquired independently from one another. In a field of cultural production, symbolic capital affords individuals the ability to do certain things that others cannot do; the individual's notoriety places that person in a position of power. That power legitimizes that individual and his or her behavior in the cultural field.

Canonization is the ultimate granting of symbolic capital to an individual or group, and that capital can then be transferred in a process we can call "influence." In the introduction to his translation of Bourdieu's book *The Field of Cultural Production*, Randal Johnson writes,

> the establishment of a canon in the guise of a universally valued cultural inheritance or patrimony constitutes an act of 'symbolic violence', as Bourdieu

> defines the term, in that it gains legitimacy by misrecognizing the underlying power relations which serve, in part, to guarantee the continued reproduction of the legitimacy of those who produce or defend the canon.[5]

With the concept of "symbolic violence," Bourdieu offers an alternative way of understanding classification within the field, and we can look at the dramatic canon as a good example of how it works. When a particular play, for instance, is added to the dramatic canon, it is added at the exclusion of other works which might otherwise have been included. The canon is not, of course, a codified and permanent list kept somewhere by distinguished "canon-keepers," but rather it is merely an agreement between participants within the field, and as such, it fluctuates as the agreements fluctuate. It is a system that has been put in place by someone for the purposes of doing something, and that something, according to Bourdieu, is the continued "reproduction of legitimacy" of the prevailing agreement.

The dramatic canon consists of plays which have been "agreed" to be the "most important" dramatic works that should be widely known, studied and (re-)produced by students, scholars and theatre artists. Things within the canon become markers, measuring sticks with which one might determine whether something else is good or bad. Because they are used in this way, they have a way of reinscribing their own importance. The plays of William Shakespeare are the quintessential example of this; we have for so long utilized Shakespeare's plays as a measure for dramatic excellence that we cannot now think about theatre and plays without thinking of Shakespeare. We do not have theatre companies called the "Royal Marlowe Festival" or acting classes in "Marlovian acting," no matter how much we could admire Christopher Marlowe's works. Even he is judged in relation to Shakespeare – though Marlowe has not necessarily been excluded

from the canon – and a Shakespearean acting course might also be geared to help actors perform in Marlowe's plays. But it is Shakespeare who we use to define drama in Elizabethan England (and beyond) and not Marlowe.

We know that there are dramatic works and artists that we consider to be more important than others, just as there are actors, directors, designers and even theatre companies that are constantly cited as being more important or influential than others. Over time, people within the field tend to either reinforce or question the canon they inherited from the previous generation, and thus it is periodically reaffirmed or reshaped. Historical importance is a means of classification, and it too results from symbolic violence. Bourdieu asserts that classification is self-justifying and self-perpetuating. He writes:

> the field of production and diffusion can only be fully understood if one treats it as a field of competition for the monopoly of the legitimate exercise of symbolic violence. Such a construction allows us to define the field of restricted production as the scene of competition for the power to grant cultural consecration, but also as the system specifically designed to fulfil a consecration function as well as a system for reproducing producers of a determinate type of cultural goods, and the consumer capable of consuming them. … [By] their symbolic sanctions, especially by practicing a form of co-optation, the principle of all manifestations of recognition, these authorities consecrate a certain type of work and a certain type of cultivated person.[6]

Not only do individuals within the field compete against each other, they are specifically competing for the right to define, the right to say what's good and bad. What's more, Bourdieu indicates that by securing the right to define, individuals can control the system of production and to determine what is produced, as well as to create consumers who understand and recognize how to discern what's good and bad based on criteria they glean from their educational and cultural background.

In the field of theatre, when a theatre company produces a Shakespeare play, for

example, this very act of production means something to the potential audience and critics. It perhaps connotes a seriousness about a company's production goals or even that a company has reached a certain level of achievement that allows them to attempt to produce what has been judged the "best of the best." Producing Shakespeare does not have the same meaning to other people within the field as when the same company produces the work of a lesser-known or unknown playwright. Shakespeare's fame (his symbolic capital) is in some measure transferred onto the company in question. Shakespeare needs to do nothing himself to affect this transfer; the symbolic capital of his name alone is enough. The company, of course, can "fail" and can waste their symbolic capital, and a "bad" production of Shakespeare says something about a company, too. We might say that the company is not yet "ready" to tackle the "master" and his works; perhaps they need more training or more experience before tackling Shakespeare again. By our saying so, one can see the hierarchy at work. Cherub's productions of Shakespeare (and they did many) were often seen by the ACGB in this way; the company was often accused of warping Shakespeare – it saw itself as "bringing new life" to classic texts – and they were often derided as being too "young" or lacking quality due to inexperience. However, the company's work utilized a deliberate strategy that was profoundly misread by the ACGB's staff, setting up a conflict for the right to define within the cultural field.

Potted History of the Arts Council

The ACGB had to work to establish itself as an arbiter of culture. As the British populace swept Winston Churchill's Conservative government out of power after the war

in Europe ended in 1945, both economic and psychic recovery were on the agenda of the government of the new Prime Minster, Clement Atlee. The liberal individualism which had characterized much of the 19th century and had fostered a global empire and two world wars was swiftly swept away, replaced by a Keynesian, socialist-collectivist approach featuring nationalized industries and the establishment of the National Health Service. John Maynard Keynes' own pet project, the Arts Council of Great Britain, also emerged from the war seeking to foster a new era of the arts in Britain. The ACGB would eventually grow to support some of the premier institutions in the UK, including the National Theatre, the Royal Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Court and numerous other companies and artists that would become internationally-known.

The nascent Arts Council of Great Britain, born of the remnants of the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA), was specifically founded by Keynes along collectivist principles. CEMA had been about fostering the arts throughout the country during wartime, to maintain both a sense of normalcy and of solidarity amidst the chaos of German bombings. As Andrew Sinclair notes in his book on the Arts Council,

> a synthesis of sympathy began to deny [T.S.] Eliot's apartness of the classes, and a common cause looked for every way to preserve a national culture. The perils of conflict wonderfully enhance the recollected pleasures of peace. In that sense, war encourages the arts for it forges a general desire for them – what Matthew Arnold wanted, a study of and quest for perfection.[7]

CEMA sustained the arts in the UK during the war, and with the danger of gathering large crowds into theatres in the major cities, it generally sponsored small tours to the provinces and local (community) productions. After the war, CEMA became the Arts Council of Great Britain. From its earliest days, the Arts Council struggled to define its role: to either promote excellence or to make art accessible, or, in other words, to find the

right balance between "raise" and "spread." Sinclair writes that the ACGB's charter mission was four-fold:

> …[T]he primary purpose of the Arts Council was 'developing a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively.' Its secondary purpose in particular was 'to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public throughout Our Realm'; thirdly, 'to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts'; fourthly, 'to advise and co-operate with Our Government Departments, local authorities and other bodies on any matters concerned directly or indirectly with those objects.' [8]

Numerous attempts were made to reconcile the first mission with the second, but the power derived from the exercise of the third ultimately proved too tempting. All four missions were in constant tension with one another, and different individuals on the ACGB's staff often pursued one or two with more vigor than the others. Eventually, the ACGB adopted a policy that became known as "Raise and Spread." It was elaborated by Secretary General William Emrys Williams (served 1951-1963) in an annual report:

> Might it not be better to accept the realistic fact that the living theatre of good quality cannot be widely accessible and to concentrate our resources upon establishing a few more *shrines* like Stratford and the Bristol Old Vic? Is it good policy to encourage small, ill-equipped expeditions to set out into the wilderness and present meager productions in village fit-ups? … In reconsidering the exhortation of its Charter to 'Raise and Spread' the Council may decide for the time being, to emphasise the first more than the second word, and to *devote itself to the support of two or three exemplary theatres which might re-affirm the supremacy of standards in our national theatre.* … High standards can be built only on a limited scale. The motto which Meleager wrote to be carved over the door of a patrician nursery might be one for the Arts Council to follow in deciding what to support during the few straitened years – "Few, but roses"… [9]

With its Raise and Spread policy, the ACGB was, in the 1950s, merely heeding a call that had already been fairly prominent in arts circles since the 19th century, that of essentially a trickling-down of culture. John Christie, founder of the Glyndebourne Opera, an organization fully supported by private donors, wrote a letter to a member of the Arts Council in which he said, "our view is that the method, which can achieve this purpose, is

to light incandescent fires in a few places, the sparks from which will fall far and wide and are likely to set alight whatever material will burn."[10] The danger for Christie in opting to Spread the arts without first Raising firm centers of excellence was that "mediocrity" would reign. "Mediocrity will set nothing on fire… Mediocrity is like damp sheets. / The way to distribute Art is by creating great Artistic achievement. Light a few fires in the Country and raise these to incandescence."[11]

Within the theatre segment, the ACGB of the 1980s could look back and attribute many successes to "Raise and Spread." Public subsidy had been given to sustain the Royal Shakespeare Company and for the establishment of the Royal National Theatre, and these would become two of the primary centers for excellence. Subsidy had also been used to support the work of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court, the site of the "revolution" of 1956 in British theatre with the production of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger*. Through the 1950s and 60s, "Raise and Spread" helped to re-establish British theatre on the world stage. As Dan Rebellato has documented, London's stages would usher out the posh and supposedly soul-less work of Noel Coward and Terrance Rattigan to welcome the work of "Angry Young Men" like Osborne, John Arden and Edward Bond.[12] When official censorship ended in 1968, companies of every ideological stripe began to form, producing theatre which was in direct opposition to the "mainstream." Increasingly, through the 1970s these theatre companies sought funding from the ACGB. The general upwelling of what became known as "alternative" theatre forced the cultural field to adapt in order to accommodate the myriad new companies.

The ACGB developed specific funding streams to direct to the new segment, though many both inside the ACGB and elsewhere wondered about the wisdom of

supporting companies whose quality was sometimes suspect. Both mainstream and alternative companies pressed for funding, and the ACGB did its best to acquire as much information on all of the various companies who wanted something from it. The ACGB was hierarchically organized, with the full Council meeting regularly to make "decisions" based on the work and reporting of the full-time staff. Each "art" had a department, and theatre was funded by the Drama Department. Generally, the ACGB Drama Department would send reviewers to report on the performances of any company who wished to seek subsidy. Those reviewers were sometimes direct employees of the ACGB: officers, who did the daily grunt work and were the immediate face of the ACGB that most companies saw regularly; or the drama director and his assistants, those in charge of the department and who oversaw the work of the officers. Other reports were written by members of the drama advisory panel who were unpaid "professionals" from whom the ACGB saw fit to request advice. Sometimes even full members of the Council itself were asked to write reports, and occasionally reports were requested from people outside the Council, especially from those who worked for Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) or who were notable figures in the field.

During the 1980s, great changes took place in the theatrical field in Britain. D. Keith Peacock notes that companies like Women's Theatre Group, a woman-focused troupe which had started in the 1970s (and who would produce *Playhouse Creatures* in the 1990s), had experienced first-hand the consequences of the ACGB's aesthetic standards. Like other alternative companies WTG constantly fought against the idea that they "have not produced a body of work that conforms to the critical standards of excellence claimed by the mainstream theatre."[13] The ACGB employed people whose

training was in mainstream theatre, by and large, and their judgements were often based upon their training. As Sandy Craig asserts, however, being "alternative" was not accidental, but purposeful. Craig defines the alternative as "a theatre in conscious opposition to both commercial and subsidized theatre, a theatre which wished to be entertaining but not bound to the profit principle."[14] Companies like WTG, especially in its early days, produced largely agit prop theatre pieces about women's issues, and over time it began to produce more plays. As the 1970s gave way to the 1980s, Libby Mason wrote, the company found itself largely stuck either producing plays which were "missionary" – bringing their plight to the uninformed – or "ghetto" – preaching to the converted.[15]

WTG, like other companies, became weary of being pigeonholed as an ideological theatre; they wanted to produce plays that meant something to an audience and were also feminist. They wanted their political ideology to spread. Throughout the 1980s, though, the ACGB increasingly enforced new standards to "professionalize" theatres, and this had the impact of inscribing companies with what were essentially "brands." WTG did "feminist" theatre, and other companies were similarly conceptualized. The new emphasis was particularly effective at making mainstream British theatre popular the world over, but it brought a specifically capitalist ethos to the production model. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher herself rejoiced in British theatre's new international visibility: "Look at Andrew Lloyd Webber!" she remarked when Sir Peter Hall, the head of the National Theatre, complained about the state of British theatre.[16] By the 1990s, the political "revolution" that was hoped for by many of the alternative theatre companies was over, and it hadn't been won by the alternative,

socialist-leaning artists that emerged after theatre censorship ended in 1968. By the time of Thatcher's political defeat in 1990, most of the alternative artists of the 1970s who survived the 1980s had been re-shaped and re-molded into something they had never envisioned: mainstream companies who had to rely upon the box office and corporate sponsorship almost as much as they did government subsidy. This has generally been seen as the "failure" of the alternative project, and it has since been recorded as such by historians.[17] Equally, though, the alternative's entrée into the mainstream can be seen as the mainstream's acceptance of alternative forms, arguably a "success" of the alternative project. The mainstream itself had shifted to allow alternative notables like playwright David Hare and director Jatinder Verma to form associations with the National Theatre. On the one hand, the political objectives had not been met, but British theatre was irrevocably changed: it was democratized and a considerable space had been carved out (the Fringe) for new companies to emerge.

The ACGB generally saw the professionalization of the alternative theatre as a victory, not necessarily one against socialism (as Thatcher might have seen it), but rather as a general improvement to theatrical practice. Ian Brown, former Drama Director, lauds the ACGB for making this transition possible. Now a professor at Kingston University, Brown writes in hindsight and with pride of the release of *Theatre IS for All,* the written report of the commission headed by Sir Kenneth Cork in 1986:

> Until the mid-1980s, there had been a tendency, rooted in oppositional thinking of the early 1970s and perhaps earlier, to see competing categories in theatre. The national companies were everyone's enemy, seen as leaching money from regional theatre. Radical touring companies opposed building-based companies they saw as mostly bastions of bourgeois tradition … Meanwhile, it was possible to hear from an older generation of artistic directors describe outreach and work with young people as 'social work, not theatre'. What *Theatre IS for All*, swiftly endorsed by the theatre community, demonstrated was that these divisions were

> not simply counterproductive. They actually denied the ways in which English theatre had evolved and was interdependently operating. Striking evidence of the changes Cork facilitated is that, within five years of the report, Verma's Tara Arts was performing on the stage of the National Theatre he had so recently disowned.[18]

Elsewhere, Brown attempts to make the case for the Arts Council being a "counter-Thatcherite" organization which with its "support for and development of drama by the Arts Council in England sought to work against the grain of Thatcherism."[19]

Three separate and distinct groups were at work in the cultural field of British theatre in the 1980s: the Thatcher government, the Arts Council (along with other arts funding bodies), and the artists themselves. One can overstate the relationship of the Thatcher government and the Arts Council, and while I don't agree with Brown that the ACGB was anti-Thatcherite, I do ultimately find it unhelpful to conflate the desires of Thatcherism with those of the Arts Council, particularly in the early 1980s. The ACGB was designed to be a quango, a quasi-autonomous government organization, which supposedly operated "at arm's length" from government. It received its budget from the government, but was not dependent on the government to make decisions about who it spent the money on. As Charles Osborne points out, the Council assessed how much grant-in-aid it expected to pay out in a given year, added the administrative costs of running the organization, and made a request to Parliament. Parliament then decided how much of the requested amount it would provide.

However, the ACGB was not able to remain fully separate from government influence. Unquestionably, arts subsidy was subject to a radical ideology shift throughout the 1980s, along with most of the rest of the British economy. Thatcher's practical goal was to eliminate the Welfare State which had been developed at the end of

World War II. Her methodology ran far deeper than just re-structuring programs and privatizing industry. As Stuart Hall writes, "Thatcherism's project was to transform the state in order to restructure society; to decentre, to displace, the whole post-war formation; to reverse the political culture which had formed the basis of the political settlement – the historic compromise between labour and capital."[20] Margaret Thatcher's government ushered in a new understanding of what it was to be British: a "classless" society where government was not an unmanageable behemoth and was not responsible for making the trains run on time. Thatcherism was, in its way, not a fully new ideology, but rather a repackaging of the liberal capitalism which so dominated the 19th century, hence the term "neoliberal." As Hall has described it, Thatcherism was an "authoritarian populism" that was able to "cut across and between the different divisions in society and to connect with certain aspects of popular experience. … Ideologically, it has made itself, to some degree, not only one of 'Them', but, more disconcertingly, part of 'Us.'"[21] The outcome of Thatcherism was an ideological shift so profound that it could not be undone. Its effect has been lingering and permanent, and Tony Blair's Labour regime which took power in 1997 opted not to seek the reversal of many of the most sweeping of Thatcher's changes. Thus Thatcherism also had reshaped the opposition party; Labour, whose roots were fully in socialism, became "New Labour" with a more centrist approach.

The question becomes, though, how much the ACGB was dominated by Thatcherite policies. D. Keith Peacock has written that the Thatcher government's cuts in funding for the arts were due to a specific objection to specific types of theatrical performances which it perceived as political protest:

> the Thatcher government's unwillingness to continue to increase funding and its begrudging, but loudly trumpeted, occasional allocation of additional money late

> in the financial year, were intended to convey the impression that theatre was not an agency of cultural, spiritual, social or psychological welfare, but an entertainment industry that was otherwise irrelevant to the workings of society. In the Thatcherite view, it was, therefore, justifiable to provide enough money to keep theatre viable but not to encourage any activity which had sociopolitical intent unless, as with urban regeneration, it coincided with current Tory policy. By restraining funding, the government relocated theatre at a distance from topical concerns to be judged primarily on the basis of its theatrical values rather than on its contribution to the democratic structure and cultural health of British society.[22]

Peacock is correct in saying that the government did see fit to reduce the yearly amount offered to the Arts Council in certain years, causing a deficit in its budget that had to be covered by cutting grants to artists. Peacock doesn't provide specific evidence to back up his assumption that this was due to a lack of support on the part of the government for arts subsidy or because the government objected to specific artists that had been funded, unlike the 1990 case of the "NEA Four" and the National Endowment for the Arts in the United States.

The ACGB in fact survived Thatcher's regime, and it was not privatized. Arts funding remained a government programme. One problem with Peacock's assertion is that theatre was not the sole beneficiary of arts subsidy, nor was it even the largest, in this period. Art, dance, literature and music also were funded, and while two of the largest grants went to the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Royal Opera, the Royal Ballet and the English National Opera were also well-funded, as were multiple orchestras and ballet companies. Since under the arm's length approach the ACGB was solely responsible for deciding who received what subsidy, the government could not have predicted against whom the cuts would be directed. To suggest that the cuts in funding were a specific attack on specific artists is a misinterpretation of what was possible.

Another problem is Peacock's claim that "the government relocated theatre at a distance from topical concerns to be judged primarily on the basis of its theatrical values." While he's correct in seeing that the Thatcher government saw theatre as a tool for Tory policy, he claims that the government had a care for "theatrical values." Certainly, the government used arts policy to appeal and appease wide swaths of people by seeming to directly connect with things that were important to them while at the same time also seeking to get what it wanted, an example of the authoritarian populist approach Hall described. In fact, Sinclair writes that from the 1960s, government had started to understand that "the ballot boxes would be heavier for every pound spent and every decision made in the regions rather than in London. There was a harvest of Xs on paper to be reaped from nationwide urban renewal," a project in which theatre and art would play a role and a policy view with which Thatcher's government fully agreed.[23]

Peacock wants to conflate the Thatcher government and the ACGB, and though there are parallels, the ACGB also had its own mission. The ACGB also sought to appear magnanimous by making appeals and dedicating grant monies to "token" groups such as Black and Asian theatre companies. But as Dominic Hingorani points out, "in the 1980s and 1990s as the Arts Council and other funding bodies such as the Greater London Council and other Metropolitan County Councils" focused increasingly on funding difference, "there was a positive benefit in the recognition of Asian theatre in Britain with funding set aside for it, [though] this also had the paradoxical effect of keeping that work marginalized and corralled in an ethnic ghetto."[24] That doesn't mean, however, that the ACGB had markedly changed its stance on funding "excellence." Peacock's conflation of the government and the ACGB seems to blame Thatcherism for the Arts Council's focus

on excellence, an unfair accusation because the ACGB had since its early days consistently provided subsidy to those artists or groups or companies which it felt to be "the best." Like Thatcher, the ACGB could appeal to marginalized groups when it suited, especially if its change in policy could buoy the viewpoint that the Council was interested in recognizing diversity. This was a calculated effort to mollify the ACGB's detractors, not a new-found appreciation for things which the Council had previously ignored. In fact, as was the case with the Cherub Company, the ACGB's focus on its own interpretation of excellence tended more often than not to exclude difference than celebrate it.

The Position of "Alternative"

Within the field of cultural production, definitions or classifications are often taken for granted, though in an effort to narrow the conversation somewhat, I will shift to talk specifically about the field of theatre. Scholars, critics, professional theatre artists and students within the field of theatre all are trained to conform with the field's conception of what "theatre" is and what makes it "good," often without questioning these conceptions. To describe all of this rule-following, Bourdieu describes "habitus," or the way that any "field, as a field of possible forces, presents itself to each agent as a space of possibles." He goes on:

> In other words, the objective probabilities (of economic or symbolic profit, for example) inscribed in the field at a given moment only become operative and active through 'vocations', 'aspirations' and 'expectations,' i.e. in so far as they are perceived and appreciated through the schemes of perception and appreciation which constitute a habitus. These schemes, which reproduce in their own logic the fundamental divisions of the field of positions – 'pure art' / 'commercial art', 'bohemian'/ 'bourgeois', 'left bank' / 'right bank', etc. – are one of the mediations through which dispositions are adjusted to positions. Writers and artists,

> particularly newcomers, do not react to an 'objective reality' functioning as a sort of stimulus valid for every possible subject, but to a 'problem-raising situation', as Popper puts it; they help to create its intellectual and affective 'physiognomy' (horror, seduction, etc.) and therefore even the symbolic force it exerts on them.[25]

Habitus tends to guide individuals in the direction the rules set out for them. As Bourdieu notes, people are "disposed" to understand certain types of divisions, and when it comes time for them to make decisions in their lives, they often rely upon what they understand and know about the world and what they have been taught. After 1968, theatre artists in Britain increasingly understood that had a new category was emerging within the cultural field: the position of being "alternative."

Bourdieu emphasizes that one's habitus does not eliminate the potential for people to reject convention. Often, an artist who deviates from her training is able to produce works which are often classed as innovative because she's "gone outside the box," as the cliché goes. Sometimes, the changes these artists bring about and the response to them by the field can cause an alteration of the rules of the field; in the case of the field of theatre, this can lead to a reshaping of the definition or practice of theatre. This is, however, a very fine line. Deviance away from standard practices is sometimes seen as "innovative" or even "avant-garde," but too much deviation can be labeled "bad." This may be so either because the field cannot apprehend the new style or practice due to its extreme "different-ness" (we might say of things of this type that they are "before their time," though usually only in retrospect) or because an artist is reappropriating and reaching back to past practices which the field sees as having been surpassed.

Every artist wants to be unique and to stand out; that's part of the constant competition within the field. To have something that makes you special distinguishes you, but only if the field generally values what you have to offer. What of those whose

difference is not valued by the field? In the UK, "difference" on stage has often received a mixed response from the field, particularly if the influence is foreign. International artists (like Brecht's Berliner Ensemble or other touring groups from Europe, Asia or Africa) performing on British stages are often treated very differently than native-British artists who choose an alternative path, even if that path is influenced by foreign ideas. The British artists who by choice have practiced "alternative" theatre since the 1970s occupy a rather complicated location within the cultural field. For many of these artists, being alternative hasn't necessarily resulted in marginalization, though their oppositional location has offered the potential for them to be dominated within the field.

In his book *Distinction*, Bourdieu discusses what he calls "working-class aesthetics," or the determination that the working classes have an aesthetic which is unique to their social position and one which is driven by habitus. He writes:

> It must never be forgotten that the working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own 'aesthetic,' nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way. [26]

By substituting "working class" in Bourdieu's description for "alternative company," he clarifies that to be alternative is not to be separate from but in fact *to operate in relation to* the dominant, or mainstream, values of the field. So when a group like WTG or Cherub chooses to step outside the mainstream and define itself as alternative, though it may have developed an alternative aesthetic (parallel to Bourdieu's working class aesthetic) and rejected the mainstream aesthetic, they cannot alter the means by which the mainstream understands and assesses them. The mainstream will utilize the dominant

aesthetic when making distinctions, as Bourdieu indicates. Further, he says that the dominated aesthetic *also defines itself* in relation to the mainstream aesthetic, perhaps even using the mainstream's values. This makes sense because though a company may now being doing alternative work, its members were doubtless trained to produce mainstream work or at least grew up seeing mainstream work. They inevitably see their own work in relation to the work of the mainstream. Bourdieu gives the example of workers looking at a photograph which has previously been judged acceptable by the dominant aesthetic. They might reply, "Yes, it's beautiful, but you have to like it, it's not my cup of tea." This paying of lip service, Bourdieu says, indicates that they acknowledge that their own position (their own feelings about the photograph) is less valid than that of the dominant aesthetic. In other words, they buy into the fact that the dominant aesthetic gets to make the assessment, even though they disagree with that judgement.

British alternative theatre companies that emerged in the 1970s, though they chose to produce work in opposition to the mainstream, still acknowledged that the mainstream had the authority to make distinctions that carried consequences for everyone within the field. The evidence for this is in their seeking funding from the ACGB. ACGB Secretary-General Sir Roy Shaw (served from 1975-1983) said that former Council Chairman Lord Goodman used to question "whether it was the duty of the state to actually subsidize those who are working to overthrow it." For Shaw and the ACGB, the question was a constantly pressing one, though they did fund alternative theatre. Eventually, the new segment was large enough to prompt the formation of a new advisory panel within the Drama Department of the ACGB to assist in determining which

companies should receive funding. But one should perhaps ask why the alternative artists did not seek to overthrow the ACGB's judgement and demand the subsidy they felt themselves due, national and mainstream companies (the largest recipient of ACGB subsidy) be damned. It seems like an absurd statement because of the impossibility of the act. The ACGB held a tremendous amount of cultural (and economic) capital, and it was not an entity which could be avoided in the 1970s and '80s. Its granting of subsidy was an acknowledgement of a company's acceptance by the mainstream, even if part of that acceptance was acknowledging that the company had chosen to operate in opposition to that mainstream. Thus, a company could see itself (and be seen by others) as "successful" and to have won a tremendous victory by being granted legitimacy. Ultimately the victory is somewhat hollow, as Bourdieu notes, because it in fact produces a tacit acknowledgement of the dominant aesthetic by the dominated. Such a victory does not alter the status quo, and, in fact, it reaffirms it.

Alternative, though, is a complicated position to occupy, and the word itself is problematic. It becomes a category like any other, and as such it is subject to stereotyping and over-determination. In Britain, "alternative" theatre was (and often still is) shorthand for the left-wing political theatre which flowered after official theatre censorship ended in 1968. To this day, the phrase "alternative theatre" signifies for many people "political theatre." This has allowed for a specific historical narrative to dominate: the left-wing political theatres advocated revolutionary social change in their work during the 1970s and 80s, but due to Thatcherism and the ACGB's push towards professionalization during the 1980s, the alternative theatres died out. Their mission was ultimately unsuccessful, or so the narrative runs, and the alternative project failed.

Many companies were also considered "alternative" because their cultural or ethnic identity caused them to be viewed by the field in that way, regardless of whether or not they actually chose to be in opposition. In particular, Black and Asian British companies, like Tara Arts or Temba, can often be seen as part of the dominated aesthetic within the field of theatre, and it is difficult to say whether they set themselves up as oppositional from the beginning or whether it was the response of the field that relegated them to the alternative position. One could ask similar questions about gay and feminist companies like Gay Sweatshop, Women's Theatre Group or Monstrous Regiment. In hindsight, historians have tended to depend on these companies' political motivation to assign them to the alternative category. If these companies are alternative, though, their existence and ongoing work beyond the supposed "death" of the alternative raises significant questions about the standard historiographical narrative.

Similarly, the Cherub Company, whose position within the alternative theatre has been ignored by historians, is a problem. The company was not overtly political, and instead, they set themselves up as opposed to the dominant theatrical practices within mainstream theatre. They also had a very East European aesthetic as the foundation of their production methods. They fit neatly into no conventional categories for British theatre. And though Cherub sought funding from the ACGB, they were never granted it, which has ultimately denied them legitimacy. Part of the reason for the ACGB's rejection of the company is that the company itself rejected the position of being part of a dominated aesthetic. Cherub did not conform to the ACGB's expectations, partially because the ACGB would not articulate them, and partially because Cherub did not see those expectations as valid. The company's aesthetic prompted a specifically different

style of theatre and performance that the ACGB, ever in its pursuit to reward excellence, decided was "bad."

When the definitions that are in place in a given cultural field result in the classification of a specific theatre company, in this case Cherub, as "bad," symbolic violence occurs. Cherub, though it saw itself as "innovative" and perhaps even aspired to be "avant garde," never gained enough symbolic capital to be able to modify or escape the classification placed upon it by the dominant forces of the cultural field. It seems to have had no influence in reshaping the definitions of theatre practice in Britain between 1978 and 2003. However, the company produced shows over 25 years. Can they really have had no impact on the cultural field? Did their productions fail to alter the landscape? Surely, by the usual means by which historians measure influence, Cherub had little, but we must question how symbolic capital is granted as well as the way that symbolic violence works and the impact it has on individual artists.

Symbolic Violence and Financial Subsidy

The Cherub Company performed in England for 25 years, and despite receiving good reviews in the press, awards at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the support for international tours from the British Council, it did not receive subsidy from the ACGB. This lack of subsidy required the company to remain "on the fringe" for the entirety of its lifetime. While the company was successful in many respects, the company and its history is inevitably tied to not receiving a subsidy, which might have allowed it either a permanent home or at least a more permanent and consistent acting and producing company. In its lifespan, Cherub would often seem to be marching toward permanence,

with good newspaper reviews of its shows and its selection by the British Council, a department of the Foreign Office, to send many of its productions on foreign tours as a representative of British theatre. But, the company's lack of funds would eventually catch up with it, and this usually precipitated a turnover of the artistic forces which made its current productions stand out. Then Visnevski would build the company back up, only to have it falter again.

Cherub's desire to be "avant garde" was problematic for the ACGB, and it puts them in the company of two other British artists who had trouble being avant-garde within the field of theatre in Britain: Peter Brook and Joan Littlewood. Fellow director Peter Hall had implored Brook to say in England, but Brook wished to go elsewhere, and so departed for France in 1970. Brook's work in France evolved from his earlier study of Artaud for the Theatre of Cruelty Season (1964) at the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) as well as his friendship with Polish director Jerzy Grotowski. But his new project required the ability to experiment with theatre outside the need for box office success. Brook knew that the sort of experiments he was planning (some of which might fall under the heading of "devised" or "physical" theatre today) would have been a hard sell with the funding agencies in Britain. He had been at the RSC long enough to have lived through the vicissitudes of the government's funding of the arts and had a good understanding of what type of work the Arts Council would fund and what it would not.

Like Brook, Joan Littlewood's experiments in theatre took her away from conventional British performance. Littlewood began in the agit-prop, socialist theatre movements in the 1920s and so had a long history with non-text-based work. Partially for this reason, Littlewood herself had difficulty receiving ACGB funding. Also, as

Robert Leach writes, Littlewood differed significantly from her theatrical peers, especially those at the Royal Court, most of whom were middle class, university-educated, and male. He goes on to say, "[her peers] all required – and received – financial support from the state, which more and more they came to rely on. Would this have solved Theatre Workshop's perennial [money] problems? It implied a compromise that Joan Littlewood was never realistically asked to make."[27] Leach implies that Littlewood was not playing the funding "game," not interested in making compromises to her work and the structure of her company to conform to the ACGB's standards. What might she have done if she had been given the option? Dan Rebellato notes that with the comparatively paltry amounts that the ACGB offered Theatre Workshop, Littlewood may have not found the compromise worthwhile.[28] Littlewood's company did have its successes, though, and it was able to send several of its productions to the West End. Some compromises had to be made, especially to the finale of the now-classic *Oh What A Lovely War!* which was altered to suit a different audience once it moved to the West End. This indicates that Littlewood could be amenable to external shaping when necessary. The West End shows aside, in Theatre Workshop's case the ACGB was operating, as it always has, on its own notion of what a theatre company should be, encompassing both working practices and company structure. Theatre Workshop didn't meet these standards. As Sandy Craig writes, "the institutional practices of the ACGB seek to impose a different way of working on [alternative companies] which, because of their financial dependence on the ACGB, they find hard to resist."[29] In her case, Littlewood resisted and paid the penalty in reduced subsidy.

Visnevski was no different than many other theatre artists who have sought the

ability to continue creating theatre in the way they envision. Littlewood had wished to do the same, as did Brook. But to be able to do what one wants, companies had to be very adept at "playing the game" with the ACGB to get financial support. Those who could not or did not play the game successfully were often in trouble. As funding from the ACGB became increasingly difficult to acquire by the mid-1980s, Cherub adapted its model to become more "mainstream," including producing "safe" Shakespeare plays like *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet*, and *As You Like It*, in an effort to appeal to a broader audience and, perhaps, to demonstrate to the ACGB they could produce those types of plays successfully and draw and audience. With these productions, Visnevski perhaps hoped that some give and take would be available with the ACGB. However, Cherub's *Twelfth Night* was hardly the conventional production of that play, and so even with a change in material, Visnevski hadn't altered his aesthetic vision.

Like Littlewood, Visnevski was trying to walk the line between his own artistic principles and the ones that he could perceive the ACGB was placing on his productions. But Visnevski was not good at being a politician with the ACGB and did not know specifically what the ACGB's objections were, because the ACGB officer reports were not available to the artists. What he knew was that he wasn't getting funding, and in desperation, he and his company made some decisions that led them into a very complicated relationship with the ACGB. The funding game has its consequences. In the end, Littlewood had found her position untenable, and when she could no longer work as she saw fit, she gave up directing entirely and moved to France. Visnevski would leave Cherub too, but he did not give up easily, and continued his attempts until 2003.

While Visnevski never attempted to work as Littlewood and Brook did, I can

discern an attempt by Cherub to set itself as "innovative," a moniker along with "avant garde" with which both Brook and Littlewood are sometimes classified. Cherub's choice of productions (initially all plays which had rarely, if ever, seen productions in London) was certainly beyond the mainstream, and Visnevski describes this as enabling him to craft productions and performances which worked in opposition to the "small-scale television realism" that he felt had become the dominant mode in British production and performance. He also wished to bring European modernism to the British stage, largely through the influences of the many playwrights and artists he admired. Designs for Cherub's productions were inspired by many artists, including George Grosz, Max Beckmann and Marc Chagall, and historically avant-garde practices such as surrealism and expressionism can clearly be seen in the company's productions.

Classifications such as "innovative" or "avant garde" are highly subjective and are clear opportunities for symbolic violence. As Christopher Innes notes in his book *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992*, the phrase "'avant garde' is by no means value-neutral."[30] Though the phrase at its root can mean "the leading edge of artistic experiment, which is continually outdated by the next step forward," Innes hones his definition down to groups which in his mind experiment with "primitivism," or the "exploration of dream states" and having a "quasi-religious focus on myth and magic."[31] As primarily a literary critic, he also tends to ignore those companies or artists who did not work from written texts. Arnold Aronson, in his book on the American avant garde, adopts a different definition, saying that only the "fundamental building blocks of a radical European avant-garde" found their way into American theatre, largely as "mere stylistic conceits in the hands of most American playwrights."[32] Both Innes and Aronson

shape their definition around the history that they want to tell; in Innes' case, he focuses mostly on theatre movements which worked in relation to a theatrical text (and hence ignores Dada), and Aronson wants to talk only about the artists in America that he deems to fit into his definition of avant garde. To be considered avant garde is contingent upon fitting into whatever measure a particular historian uses to understand the term.

In his account of the history of the avant garde, Innes only identifies one British figure (Brook) that he considers avant garde, and in his book on British drama he notes the resistance of British theatre to the avant garde movements of Europe. Innes attributes this to the pervasive influence of George Bernard Shaw on the British theatre. In this instance, Innes defines the lack of a British avant garde on the lack of influence in Britain of "Symbolism, Expressionism, Surrealism, Dada, Futurism, Antonin Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', and the Absurd,"[33] though he notes Brook's interest in Artaud's theories (which is one of his main arguments for Brook's inclusion in *Avant Garde Theatre*). But if indeed *who* is considered avant garde rests upon the definition one has of the very term "avant garde," a reconsideration of the definition of the avant garde might reveal other artists in Britain (or elsewhere) who could be called avant garde. Though, as Alan Woods helpfully reminds us, any focus on the avant garde is simply a focus on innovation, on what is "new" in contrast to what is already present.[34]

It is here that I wonder about how the ACGB saw Cherub's work. Though Cherub sought to be innovative in their work, did the Council so perceive Visnevski in the vein of the British innovators like Brook and Littlewood that his work was seen as merely a duplicate of things which had come before? Perhaps what truly cast Visnevski's work with Cherub into shadow from the ACGB's point of view was the bright light of the

innovations that Brook and Littlewood brought forward in the 1950s and 60s which were in many ways seen as passé by the 1980s. The ACGB's assessment of Cherub was essentially definitive; though the company was encouraged to seek other avenues of financial support, without the imprimatur of the ACGB most other funders refused Cherub's requests. Because the ACGB had not granted them subsidy, other funding streams were impossible to acquire, thus sealing the company's financial fate. That they managed to continue on for 25 years is remarkable in and of itself, and the company's duration justifies a further examination of its impact and legacy.

Undoing Order: Foucault's Genealogy

In his essay "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Michel Foucault calls for a new model of history, one which follows Friedrich Nietzsche's examination of "genealogy." This history-as-genealogy model "opposes itself to the search for 'origins'"[35] in favor of descent and the identification of "the accidents, the minute deviations…, the errors, the false appraisals and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us."[36] Foucault is asking us to identify a new way of approaching history, one less dependent upon what we already know. Foucault's call for a more inclusive historiography and his genealogical model is ideal for assessing the potential pervasiveness of a company such as Cherub. The company existed for 25 years, produced over 30 productions, many of which lived in its repertoire for years and were seen by countless audiences both in the UK and abroad. Further, the Cherub company turned over significantly over the years, and its work was altered by these individuals as they came and went. They, too, were altered by their experience and went on to other

ventures, bringing with them the embodied knowledge that they took from their time with Cherub.

For a theatre historian attempting a genealogical approach to theatre and performance, Foucault has set high standards; Foucault even fronts his discussion with the caveat that genealogy "depends on a vast accumulation of source material."[37] To concretize what Foucault is describing, instead of the straight, linear "timeline" historians are accustomed to, one should envision a genealogical tree with its multiple lines connecting events to one another, with each "generation" adding additional complexity and more bifurcated lines, extending out further and further *ad infinitum*. This model forces historians to not just pick a spot on a pre-determined line that they wish to examine in more detail and prevents them from seeing any one location as separate and distinct from another. It also resists directly causal interpretations. Instead of simply finding the truth in an origin, Foucault says that historians will find "the dissention of other things…disparity."[38]

It is time for a new assessment of the history of British alternative theatre. The conventional narrative presupposes that all companies operate in similar fashion, and for a large majority of those companies operating in the 1970s and 1980s, this is true. But Foucault asserts that history is not a tool which should exclusively focus on the majority. The problem with the conventional narrative is that it tends to efface those companies which do not comfortably fit into its definition of alternative. Like avant garde, the definition of alternative allows historians to talk about the things they wish to talk about and to ignore the rest. Our research agendas and dissertation guidelines require scholars to demonstrate the worthiness of a historical research project; one must therefore have a

compelling reason to document. My compelling reason to document Cherub is not because the company was notable or famous or even conventionally important; it is because it was none of those things. This project aims to examine the way that the company came to be erased from the historical record.

To be clear, this is not an active erasure but a passive one. The practices of the field of history demand that we work in specific ways; it is through this process that the erasure occurs. We act through our habitus, not often stopping to ask if what we are doing is the right course of action. As Foucault says, we are not asking the right questions, because we merely want confirmation of things that we already know or believe. There is no mysterious cabal of scholars seeking to erase Cherub and other such companies; theatre historians have not yet done this work, largely because we don't believe it needs to be done. With this examination of Cherub, I seek to demonstrate that research into the neglected past – into the unimportant – is worthwhile.

Foucault asks us to understand that history is not just progression or regression, it is also depth. History exists in multiple dimensions. To speak of genealogy is to talk of "going back" and about digging to find our roots. Digging also disturbs, and the roots are often much more twisted, complicated and interconnected than might have initially been supposed. They connect, perhaps, to another tree, or not even to a tree, but also to the soil and its wetness, its minerals. These are also sustaining, but they also have their own metaphorical roots: they too have a genealogy. Following these roots, digging ever deeper, also reveals other things. What more will be revealed is limitless, as is the amount of disturbance. And at some point historians who do this digging should realize that disturbance is actually at the root of what they are attempting to do in the first place;

that the search for an "origin" is only a cover for what we should actually be doing: disturbing and unearthing and laying waste to foundations that we previously believed and that we had previously taken for granted as "truth." This close and disruptive study is, for Foucault, "effective history."

In a way, this strategy is not dissimilar from what Thomas Postlewait asks theatre historians to do with his model in which "possible worlds," "receptions," "artistic heritage", and "agents" are linked both to each other and toward the central event under examination.[39] In sync with Foucault, Postlewait indicates that in this model, historians are always implicated in their own history, as functions of "agents," "receptions," and certainly "artistic heritage" at the very least. Postlewait's model, like Foucault's, is a means of making history more complex, for prompting historians to ask questions both about what they don't know, but also about what they do know and about what they believe. As Foucault asserts: "[genealogy] disturbs what was previously considered immobile; it fragments what was thought unified; it shows the heterogeneity of what was imagined consistent with itself."[40]

What is a theatre historian who wishes to proceed via a genealogical approach supposed to do? First, we must question everything that we believe to be "true." As Postlewait notes, theatre historians do not question often enough our methods of periodization, and we rarely seek to question and possibly dismantle the structures by which we define theatre practice and practitioners, including genres, forms, styles, periods and modes. Some theatre historians nod towards "effective history," but do not go far enough in actually practicing it. In her book *Staging the UK*, Jen Harvie asserts that by using Foucault's genealogical method to examine the performances of

nationalities which are under-represented in British theatre history, she is able to focus "on national identities because … they produce and distribute power, power that can be both oppressive and enabling."[41]

In her effort, Harvie details multiple events and companies which had certainly been under-represented, but most of the companies she chose have previously been documented elsewhere. She looks, for example, at the events surrounding the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, and she recognizes the legitimacy of her subjects when she notes that most of these companies received government subsidy. A closer examination reveals that she is utilizing a tried-and-true methodology for what makes theatrical events "important." In her discussion of an alternative history of British theatre at the end of the 20th century, she discusses two reasonably prominent companies in alternative theatre, Complicité and DV8. With these companies, Harvie says she wishes to display a "selection of important (if often repressed) instances where twentieth-century mainland European theatre in particular has been introduced and has influenced British theatre."[42] As worthy as that effort is, by examining these two companies in particular, Harvie has actually reinforced traditional means of ascertaining historical importance, and does not go far enough at using Foucault's genealogy. She is, in fact, legitimizing the power transfer inherent in symbolic capital, and she ignores the deeper, more hidden influences for the sake of the easily-accessed ones.

Her argument for these particular companies is largely based on three things: legacy, innovation and influence. By legacy, I refer to the inheritance a practitioner or company might receive from previous generations, and for both companies, Harvie lists historical "avant-garde" influences, beginning to build a case for her inclusion of

Complicité and DV8. Second, she has clearly selected these companies based upon her perception of their innovative techniques, a privileging that Alan Woods has warned against: "focusing on the new, the experimental, and the unusual has its benefits, but there are also clear dangers…. Stressing the new implies that history is synonymous with *progress*, …and achievements within traditional forms tend to be ignored, or glossed over, if they do not provide clear instances of progression."[43] This is similar to Diana Taylor's assertion that, "the avant-garde's emphasis on originality, ephemerality, and newness hides multiple rich and long traditions of performance practice."[44] Harvie uses words like "inventive," "iconoclastic," "risk-taking," and "not a slavish imitation" to describe these companies' productions. Finally, Harvie focuses on the influence these companies have had on British theatre, and because her companies are well-known, it is comparatively easy for her to assess this through statements by other theatre makers or by making broad comparisons between their work and the work of other theatre artists.

Harvie's work is not misguided; history has always placed greater emphasis on clear-cut demonstrations of influence. But if we are to understand Foucault's notion of history as genealogy, influence must not be so limited. Influence should be a much more complicated a thing to assess. Does influence require symbolic capital? Must influence always be so clearly causal? Proof of influence, like any other historical inquiry, must be based on evidence, but as I have previously noted, Foucault asserts that to properly do effective history, one must often gather more evidence than when one is merely practicing history. Foucault describes the genealogist's search as molecular, and one must be particularly aware of the "minor deviations" in order to work properly. As Julie

Pearson-Little Thunder writes, using Taylor's discussion of the repertoire,[*] embodied practices (like performance) rely upon multiple inheritances, akin to Bourdieu's habitus. As Little Thunder notes, "behavior[s] must be largely unconscious to qualify as habitus,"[45] which indicates to me that influence could be more than X company indicating that they were inspired by Y's work, or historians divining clear details of X's practice in Y's productions. In order to be genealogic, historians must be able to read or discern subtle alterations in the repertoire without discernable causes. What if Y's work has changed over time, but no direct legacy can be discerned? Might they not have encountered something which had altered their practice on a more molecular, small-scale level? Is that not still influence?

I don't fault Harvie's account, but I do believe that we can go further than her approach toward what Foucault intended by asserting that historiography should be genealogic, even though she asserts that her effort is to "explore heterogeneity." Historians must question the inherited notions of historical importance if they are truly to undertake genealogical examinations. As Postlewait notes, we need to undertake a "fuller engagement with [all] terms, including the places they create ambiguities and contradictions."[46] Harvie's ready acceptance of these companies' legacy, innovation and influence in order to justify their importance does not go far enough at breaking down historically received notions of historiographical methods, as she claims to be attempting. We must examine in more detail the structures we use to define theatre practice and practitioners. These structures often direct who is recorded due to their historical "importance." Refusing to do so merely perpetuates the methodologies that Foucault has

[*] "The repertoire … enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge." (Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 20.)

asked us to question. As he asserts, "history has a more important task to be a handmaiden to philosophy, to recount the necessary birth of truth and values; it should become a differential knowledge of energies and failings, heights and degenerations, poisons and antidotes. Its task is to become a curative science."[47]

The history of the Cherub Company allows me to examine the practices of definition which lead to determinations of historical legacy (what is passed down) and influence (what one is credited with passing) and the implications on historiography. The Cherub Company has never been famous and known in the way that Complicité is, for example, and Harvie asserts that Complicité has had an influence on British theatre. Influence and legacy are often determined through evidence: we talk about one person influencing another when there is evidence "proving" that this is the case. Often this evidence consists of either attributions one artist makes when describing their own work (i.e. – "I was inspired by…"), links made by critics or historians after the fact when reading the work of one performer in the context of another, or both. In all cases, the amount of evidence required to prove influence is rather obvious, sometimes amounting to the word of the artist under study or communal associations such as one artist studying under another or in collaborative productions.

In this dissertation I'm going to make the case that such clear and concrete links need not be the exclusive means of establishing the provenance of influence. Foucault's call for an "effective history" which engages with the previously unexplored and unquestioned inspires me to call for a reckoning with the various ways we as historians understand historiography. If Foucault is correct in expressing history as effective when viewed in terms of genealogy, legacy and influence may be far more widespread and

have less to do with fame and symbolic capital than we might otherwise imagine. Our received understanding of the way legacy and influence work is in its way a search for an "origin," a search for the source of any given artist's skills and abilities. Foucault says we need to resist this search for an "origin," because inevitably what we will find if we practice history as genealogy is that the origin is "'something altogether different,'" and that behind "the image of a primordial truth" is "not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms."[48] For every clearly defined lineage from one artist to another, there are likely hundreds of others far less clearly defined and much harder to prove, but potentially every bit as significant in terms of influence.

Just because the linkages are less clear and harder to prove, does that diminish the power of the influence? One school of thought might be simply: yes. This school of thought is likely the one that views influence as a means of establishing one artist's importance through his or her relationship with another. In other words, that by proving a link between one artist and a more famous or important one, a historian can assert importance for the subject of their research. There is nothing wrong with this approach. However, following Foucault, I propose that we must go further than that to truly understand the nature of legacy and influence. Unlike Harvie, I'm going to fundamentally question the premise that "importance" or "significance" (and therefore symbolic capital) is the best way for historians to decide whose works we save or whose performances we study. We so often think that someone needs to be important or that an event needs to be critical to our understanding in order for them to qualify as worthy of study. I'm not certain that this is wrong, but I do think that it needs to be constantly

questioned and re-examined to ensure that we are not merely reinforcing existing structures which legitimize certain powerful individuals over others with less power. Companies like Cherub, who have neither importance nor significance in conventional historiographic terms, should be re-examined to ascertain that we are not neglecting those whose impact is not as obvious.

Over the next three chapters, I document the work of the Cherub Company from 1978 to roughly 1988, the first ten years of the company's existence. Over this time span, the company produced 24 out of the 38 productions they would ultimately create in the 25 years that Andrew Visnevski led the company. Even more remarkable is that 18 of those shows were done in the first five years, between 1978 and 1983. In order to survive without subsidy, one strategy Cherub adopted was to produce constantly, for they didn't get paid if they didn't sell tickets. Over time, they found they were unable to produce as many new plays, and began to rely upon constantly touring shows they had already created. While this was a viable option for a time, it ultimately led to stagnation and a loss of audience interest. They could not sustain the audience they had cultivated with fewer new productions; after 1989, the company took a hiatus, after which the company became a much more inconsistent entity. The initial years of the company's work are the prime site to examine them and their process in detail.

Through the course of my research, I have sought to determine Cherub's genealogy as much as its history. In this search, I examine the documents left behind by the company in its archive. The archive contains business records, newspaper clippings, press releases, publicity material, photographs and videos from 1978 to 2003, the entire sweep of Cherub's existence under Visnevski. I examine the contents of the archive in

detail and will question both the validity of the documents contained within as well as their legitimacy. The archive's documents are a record of history, but they are also a record of the activities of human beings operating in the field of cultural production.

The documents detail both the successes and failures of the Cherub Company; they record both *what* they did and offer a window into *why* they did it. For example, an examination of several documents mailed to potential donors reveals, over time, a change in approach on the part of the company. Initially, their marketing attempted to appeal to donors by describing the company as one that was young and just starting out. Later fundraising documents reveal a significantly different approach: essentially, the appeal was "if you don't help us, the theatre you've grown to love will disappear." The early documents reveal a more hopeful and optimistic company; the latter documents portray an increased desperation and more direct appeal for assistance. The documents record the change in strategy, and my job has been to discern why this shift occurred. Cherub received almost no government funding for its productions, largely because of negative reviews from ACGB drama officers. The definition those officers had for British theatre is clear from these reviews and is a clear example of how symbolic violence affected the Cherub Company.

In the next chapter, I examine the field of British theatre in 1979, and the sometimes disapproving response to foreign performance techniques, especially on the part of the ACGB's reviewers. A series of children's films shown on the BBC in the 1960s under the series title *Tales from Europe* seems to have had a significant impact on the way children of that generation came to understand Europe and its culture. Because the series is mentioned in ACGB documents, it provides a unique demonstration of the

British/Europe cultural binary. I then discuss the initial attempts the company made to secure subsidy from the ACGB, and I focus on the drama officer reports and other correspondence between the company and the ACGB. From these documents, I'm able to begin to develop a picture of the way ACGB understood Cherub and its work. In particular, I focus on the company's second production, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Though not their earliest production, *Kinsmen* is ultimately an important show at both demonstrating the company's commitment to producing "neglected classics" and the ACGB's response to those productions.

In order to genealogically trace the influence of the Cherub Company, and thus to accurately depict its legacy, I also examine their repertoire. Cherub worked with a wide variety of actors, directors, playwrights, designers and technicians over its 25-year span, and I have sought out many of these people to ascertain not only their involvement with Cherub but also any potential impact their work with the company had on their artistic lives. Most of them went on to work at both professional theatres and educational institutions. What part of Cherub did they bring with them as they continued their artistic lives? What embodied practices have they both absorbed and then passed on? As Taylor writes about the repertoire, one must see "performance as a vital act of transfer."[49] From these interviews, I begin to assess the impact and influence Cherub had on the landscape of British theatre.

In Chapter III, I unpack the genealogy of the company. I profile founding director Andrew Visnevski and explore some of the influences he has cited as being formative as well as they way he tended to incorporate them into his productions. I also feature some of the stalwart Cherub actors and crew, those who returned to work with Visnevski on

multiple projects through the 1980s. I then utilize the production of *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, one of the two most successful productions in the company's history, as a way to examine the company's work in rehearsals to develop a script through rehearsal and into performance. I take particular note of the way in which Visnevski and the cast interacted, a sometimes easy and other times contentious rehearsal process. I also think more deeply about notions of *inspiration* and *influence* and how these terms might be employed in a more genealogic way.

In Chapter IV, I explore the relationship that Cherub developed with the British Council, a governmental organization with the mission to take British cultural products abroad. Unlike the ACGB, the BC was a consistent supporter of Cherub's work, and they funded a number of major foreign tours. The BC also went to bat for the company in Cherub's struggle with the ACGB. BC Drama Director Robert Sykes wrote to his counterpart at the ACGB, offering to provide the ACGB with the BC's assessment of Cherub to help explain the company's work in a different way. The BC felt that ACGB funding was essential to allow Cherub to continue to develop productions the BC could send overseas. The BC felt strongly that Cherub was a "cultural ambassador," though the ACGB continued to see it as a cultural pariah. I use the concept of *parerga*, as elaborated by Jacques Derrida, to explore how these two governmental entities and their disparate views of the company shaped audience reception in both the UK and abroad. I also examine the company's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, a production which was a BC favorite. The show toured to three continents on behalf of the BC and was widely admired even by those who did not speak English for its visual style allowed the foreign audiences to engage with it on a non-textual level. Meanwhile, the same shows

that were so valuable for BC audiences were seen by the ACGB as having little value for UK audiences.

Influence, when measured by what I earlier called the "communal" associations between artists (mentorship, collaboration, etc.), inherently carries the power derived by fame (symbolic capital), and it is this power which is passed from one to another. In my continued research, I intend to explore how this process works to determine any potential influence Cherub and Visnevski had on British theatre. Here the links ultimately become more tenuous, for there is little power to pass on. Nonetheless, I believe the company has had an influence. How are symbolic capital and legacy and influence related? It is these very situations that cause Foucault to ask us to question and undermine the relationship to power when he asks us to practice "effective history." He is asking us to move away from "the search [which is] directed to 'that which was already there.'"[50] As I asked earlier, must influence be strictly reserved to those whose fame allows us to discern clearly the legacies they leave behind? I believe the answer to be no, and I follow Foucault in attempting to seek a more complete explanation.

Nota bene

Michel De Certeau calls historiography "a labor of death and a labor against death,"[51] an effort at both excavation and exorcism. De Certeau believes that historians seek, through writing, to organize history, to put it in place in a way that makes sense, to eliminate the anguish that comes with doubt and uncertainty. Historiography is the means by which we seek to answer the questions that linger in order that we might be more comfortable living in the world. Like Foucault, though, De Certeau cautions that

we have come to understand that there is no definite, all-complete "answer." In our zeal for closure, he warns, we must not historiographically construct grand monuments, for though these may mark the existence of something, their beauty also has a tendency to obscure the complications and misapprehensions that are the raw material of history. "Writing speaks of the past only in order to inter it," De Certeau writes. "Writing is a tomb in the double sense of the word in that, in the very same text, it both honors and eliminates."[52]

I confess that my initial impulse has been to sanctify Cherub, to create a scriptural tomb: one of beauty, made of the best words and the best ideas. I am inclined to do so because I am a product of the repertoire of the Cherub Company—or at least a product of the teaching of Andrew Visnevski—and I wish to honor that connection. As his former student, I embody some of the company's repertoire, and undoubtedly I value the company's work and practices more strongly for having them as building blocks of my education. My association with Visnevski has also undoubtedly contoured my ability to analyze the company's archive. He has twice allowed me to take possession of the archive; it has lived in my home, and I have moved it with my own possessions on several occasions as I've changed residences in both London and Eugene, Oregon. I acknowledge that I am responsible for its survival, and as such I have altered its existence. My interest in the company has prevented the archive's loss; it would have otherwise been destroyed as the company no longer had a vested interest in keeping their files around. I have changed its shape as Visnevski placed transcripts of some interviews I have done with the company's members as well as my own master's thesis into the archive. I have nurtured it, and at the same time, I have disturbed it.

I have a connection with both the company's archive and its repertoire; I cannot pretend otherwise. To properly make effective history, however, one must disturb and disrupt even one's own deeply-held notions. One must question one's own education, lifestyle, orthodoxy. In this dissertation, I have resisted my urge to entomb, to sanctify, to enshrine the Cherub Company. I have resisted because a hagiography would not be an accurate account of the company and the people who created it; by their own admission, they were not perfect and strived only to do the best they could with what they had available to them. They made mistakes, and the company's history is not complete unless I document their failures alongside their successes. More broadly, though, I have resisted because I do not wish to exorcise the ghost of Cherub's history: I do not wish to create a landmark where Cherub once stood. Cherub's repertoire is alive in me, in Visnevski's other students, in their students, in the bodies of the actors, designers, composers, technicians that worked with the company and in the bodies of everyone they ever worked with. I do not wish to create a document which allows anyone to say, the Cherub Company was then, it died and now other things exist. I have created a document which seeks to answer some of the questions about the company, but which also raises many, many others. This dissertation is an initial foray into the archive and repertoire of the Cherub Company, and I hope I'm not the first or the last to venture within.

Notes

[1] April De Angelis, "Playhouse Creatures," in *Plays One* (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1999), 168-69.

[2] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, trans. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 163.

[3] Ibid, 164.

[4] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1984), 291.

[5] Randal Johnson, "Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture," in *The Field of Cultural Production* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 20.

[6] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production,* 121.

[7] Andrew Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures: The History of the 50 Years of the Arts Council of Great Britain* (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), 24.

[8] Ibid, 51.

[9] Ibid, 88. [Emphasis mine.]

[10] Ibid, 118.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Dan Rebellato, *1956 and All That* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

[13] D. Keith Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 145.

[14] Sandy Craig, *Dreams and Deconstructions* (Ambergate, Derbyshire: Amber Lane Press, 1980), 10.

[15] Libby Mason, "Afterword to *Double Vision*," in *Lesbian Plays 1,* ed. Jill Davis (London: Methuen, 1987), 52.

[16] Michael Billington, *State of the Nation: British Theatre Since 1945* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), 284.

[17] For discussions in this vein, see Craig, *Dreams and Deconstructions*; Catherine Itzen, *Stages in the Revolution: Political Theatre in Britain Since 1968* (London: Methuen, 1982); Andrew Davies, *Other Theatres: The Development of Alternative and Experimental Theatre in Britain* (London: Macmillan Education, 1987); and Baz Kershaw, "Alternative Theatres: 1946-2000," in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre, Volume 3*, ed. Kershaw (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[18] Ian Brown, "Guarding Against the Guardians: Cultural Democracy and ACGB/RAA Relations in the *Glory* Years, 1984-1994," in *The Glory of the Garden: English Regional Theatre and The Arts Council 1984-2009*, ed. Kate Dorney and Ros Merkin (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 38.

[19] Ian Brown, "The Road through Woodstock: Counter-Thatcherite Strategies in ACGB's Drama Development between 1984 and 1994," *Contemporary Theatre Review* 17, no. 2 (May 2007): 219.

[20] Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (New York: Verso, 1988), 163.

[21] Ibid, 6.

[22] Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre,* 215-6.

[23] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures,* 295.

[24] Hingorani, Dominic, *British Asian Theatre: Dramaturgy, Process and Performance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 4.

[25] Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 64.

[26] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 41.

[27] Robert Leach, *Theatre Workshop: Joan Littlewood and the Making of Modern British Theatre* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2006), 207.

[28] Reballato, *1956 and All That*, 67.

[29] Craig, *Dreams and Deconstructions,* 183.

[30] Christopher Innes, *Avant Garde Theatre 1892-1992* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1.

[31] Ibid, 3.

[32] Arnold Aronson, *American Avant-Garde Theatre: A History* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 3.

[33] Christopher Innes, *Modern British Drama* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 2.

[34] Alan Woods, "Emphasizing the Avant Garde," in *Interpreting the Theatrical*

Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 166-76.

[35] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 77.

[36] Ibid, 81.

[37] Ibid, 76.

[38] Ibid, 78.

[39] Thomas Postlewait, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 17-18.

[40] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 82.

[41] Jen Harvie, *Staging the UK* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 2.

[42] Ibid, 119.

[43] Woods, "Emphasizing the Avant Garde," 167.

[44] Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 9.

[45] Julie Little Thunder, "Acts of Transfer: The 1975 and 1976 Productions of *Raven* and *Body Indian* by Red Earth Performing Arts Company," in *Native American Performance and Representation,* ed. S.E. Wilmer (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 115.

[46] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 192.

[47] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 90.

[48] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 78.

[49] Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 2.

[50] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 78.

[51] Michel De Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 5.

[52] Ibid, 101.

CHAPTER II

1978-1980: SHAKESPEARE OR "JERK-OFF THEATRE"?

A journey by Sea and Land, Five Hundred Miles,
is not undertaken without money. – Lewis Hallam

Cherub began in 1978 and entered into the British field of cultural production just as the winds of change were beginning to blow. The 1979 general election gave the Conservative Party a majority in Parliament and made its leader, Margaret Thatcher, the first (and so far only) female prime minister of the UK. The timing of their entry into the field lined up with the massive political and economic reforms that Thatcher inflicted upon Britain. As the field was altered, the participants within the field had to adjust. Arts subsidy became increasingly contingent upon professional companies' abilities to conform to a more corporate model for organization and production. But this would only affect Cherub to a degree, for their subsidy problem was more specifically due to the type of work they wished to pursue. The company had been started by Visnevski and his friend and actor Simon Chandler as a response to the type of professional productions the two were taking part in, and they wished to make theatre which would actively confront the mainstream focus on realism and political ideology.

After he had finished his training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in 1976, Visnevski had gone on tour with a Mike Ockrent-helmed production of Caryl Brahms and Ned Sherrin's *Hush and Hide.* Visnevski:

> The show never made it to the West End, and the experience was so frightful for me – the idea of, if this is theatre, I want nothing to do with it. […Simon and I] decided we've got to do something about the situation of theatre, in the theatre. And I had my ideas of what theatre should be, you know, a small, close-knit ensemble of players who would travel anywhere with a single skip in a broken-

> down van, and wonderful theatre, obviously, wonderful plays. And he had his own idea of what a theatre producer should be. I think he saw himself with his feet on a table and a large cigar in his mouth.[1]

Visnevski and Chandler opted to solve the problem with British theatre by undertaking the revival of rarely-performed classical plays – both British and European. They had no expressed political desire, and it was because Visnevski in particular abhorred specific theatrical practices of the mainstream that they positioned the company as oppositional. Visnevski imagined a company with vibrant theatrical presentation, a mix of baroque and the "poor theatre' of Jerzy Grotowski in Poland.[*] The mission, in a sense, was to be more in the mold of the historical avant garde than the alternative theatres of the 1970s. The revival of mainstream theatre, then, would be a return to a time when theatre was both lively and culturally relevant. That mix caused them no end of difficulty with the ACGB. The ACGB's funding process would constantly engender controversy as it grew into the arbiter of culture it would become. In this chapter, I will parse out a few of the myriad definitions used by the ACGB in its internal reports and will begin to shed light on the valuing process so intrinsic to government funding for the arts in Britain during the 1970s and '80s.

Cherub's relationship with the ACGB was rocky from the outset. As the reports and correspondence show, the ACGB's staff and advisers had trouble deciding what Cherub was and what it could become. It was purportedly a fringe company doing classics in an alternative way, but "alternative" in this case did not necessarily mean political. Because Visnevski was Polish, it largely meant working from an Eastern European point of view. Unlike other companies producing with European models at this

[*] '[T]he thing which started Cherub, […] I had discovered English theatre to be Apollonian theatre, theatre of light, of the intellect, of enjoyment - without involvement. And I wanted to create a Dionysiac theatre, of total involvement, total engagement.' (Interview with author, August 17, 2005)

time, like Cheek by Jowl or (later) Complicité, who were both founded by British people who had studied European methods, Cherub was founded by someone who was adapting his native Eastern European-ness to fit the British cultural field. As a result Cherub's aesthetic gave the ACGB's staff pause because it was so different that they couldn't often figure out how it could be improved, and generally they just labeled the company's work "bad." The drama officer's reports on Cherub's productions place the ACGB squarely in the position of producing and defending particular theatrical production practices within the cultural field of Great Britain. Like other companies who did not fit into a particular mold or category, Cherub was constantly denied government subsidy by the ACGB, even though newspaper critics, other funding agencies and audiences all admired its productions.

Since the ACGB placed so much emphasis on the performance reports generated by its officers, panelists and Council members, I'm going to examine those written on Cherub's productions, and I will chart the various relationships between Cherub administrators and the ACGB's staff through those reports and the correspondence from the ACGB archive at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Cherub Archive. Neither organization was a monolith acting and reacting *in toto* with and against the other; rather, the actions which shaped the relationship between the company and the ACGB were individual, human and personal. While the institution undoubtedly shaped how the individual behaved or what he or she believed, every interaction between people is also significant in and of itself.

Life Is a Dream and *The Singing, Ringing Tree*

Visnevski is a Polish expatriate who came to London in the early 1970s after having been exiled from Poland due to a rise in government-sponsored anti-Semitism. He came to attend drama school and was offered a place in the acting programme of the Central School of Speech and Drama, beginning in 1973. "I had certain difficulties [at Central]," Visnevski said, "as I was classed as 'stylistically non-compatible' for a while. And I knew that I was marrying in me . . . what I had brought out of Poland and my admiration for certain styles of theatre and ways of performing with what was being instilled to me at Central, which was trying to be the boy next door."[2] After completing his training at Central, Visnevski was accepted into the Young Vic company, at that time under the direction of Frank Dunlop. "What Frank did manage was to create an atmosphere of nurturing the talents of the young people who joined the company," Visnevski remembers. "And if they wanted to do something, they were allowed to try it out. That's certainly the feeling I got, that's how I ended up as his assistant."[3] Eventually, Dunlop left the Young Vic and Visnevski struck out on his own as an actor. He became increasingly displeased with trying to play "the boy next door," and with fellow actor Chandler, he decided to form a theatre company. In 1978, the Cherub Company presented Pedro Caldéron de la Barca's *Life is a Dream*, adapted by Visnevski and Chandler, at Theatre Space in London. The production ran from Dec. 11-20, 1978, at Theatre Space and was performed again at the Drill Hall and the Young Vic Studio in February and March of 1979.

The company's first recorded interactions with the Arts Council are three reports from this production of *Life is a Dream*. The play, Visnevski told me, "hadn't been done

here for decades[†], and to me it was one of the great plays, and I deplored the fact that, European/Continental classics weren't being done … and I just had a more vital idea of theatre."[4] B. A. Young offered praise for the production in his review for the *Financial Times:*

> Our two big theatres both continue to ignore the Golden Age of Spanish drama, and here is the Cherub Company with a pinprick of reproach. It can be no more than a pinprick, for the Cherubs are an ad hoc company formed by two players from the golden age of the Young Vic, Andrew Visnevski and Simon Chandler, with no capital. But if they can go on as well as they have begun with their production of Calderon's *Life is a Dream* (*La vida es sueño*) we may be very grateful to them. […P]laying on an economical set, with no décor but a tiny stage, a step ladder and some blue-and-gold bunting, [the company] make a very good thing of it. […] I recommend it unreservedly.[5]

Visnevski had cut the play down to a running time of one hour and cast only eight actors, beginning to put in place the economy that would become a Cherub hallmark. As another newspaper reviewer described the show: "the play has been stripped to its bare bones to keep the action moving at a furious pace while retaining the essence of the poetry in fiery, speedily delivered speeches."[6]

In what would prove to be another Cherub hallmark, the reviewers sent by the Arts Council were less praiseworthy. A report by drama officer Jonathan Lamede noted:

> This new young company had bitten off far far more than they could chew, and could not make up for their lack of acting talent with any kind of vitality or freshness of outlook. The women were particularly bad, and it was surprising to learn afterwards that the majority of the cast had had professional experience; the standard seemed to me to be that of a group of people barely out of drama school,

[†] Four different translations of the play from Spanish into English were published between 1928 and 1970, but I have found no evidence that any of these were produced for the stage. After Cherub produced the play in 1978, the RSC produced *Life is a Dream* in 1983. In his review for the Donmar Warehouse's 2009 production, Michael Coveney wrote that the play "has not been seen to any great effect in the British theatre since John Barton's RSC production in 1983." (Michael Coveney. "Life is a Dream" whatsonstage.com. October 14, 2009. Accessed March 24, 2012.) This leads me to reasonably conclude that few productions prior to Cherub's were attempted. Critically, I cannot say this with certainty, because, though rather detailed production histories have been created by scholars for Shakespeare's plays, the plays of many other Early Modern writers have not received similar attention. A more detailed investigation of theatre records and newspaper reviews is required.

raw, unvariegated and without much grasp of rhythm, pace or inflection.[7]

From the company's earliest days, the newspaper critics and the Arts Council's officers were at odds over Cherub. Because they could not place Cherub's work in a style or genre of performance they were accustomed to seeing, the Arts Council's reviewers would often flail around for any common reference. Drama officer Jon Plowman reminisced in his report on *Life is a Dream* that, "it reminded me in production of nothing so much as the Eastern European films which were shown for children on the BBC in the early 60's [sic], were always presented by Peggy Miller and seemed always to be dubbed by the same four radio actors."[8] Plowman had associated Cherub's productions with East European performance techniques, and in saying the production was "nothing so much as" these films, he reveals that he views such techniques with little regard.

Indeed, a particular conceptualization of "Eastern Europe" and its culture would be a yardstick that the ACGB would continually use for Cherub's productions. The films Plowman refers to were shown on the BBC in the 1960s and 70s under the collective series title *Tales from Europe,*[9] and while Plowman's mention may seem to be only in passing, I think the series and its impact on Plowman himself as well as the wider British culture is important enough to discuss briefly here. I tend to take any comment or remark that Plowman makes rather seriously, for, as I will demonstrate later, though he was only at the Arts Council for just over a year, he especially went out of his way to castigate Cherub and its work. The way he (and his fellow officer Lamede) chose to view Cherub in these initial reports most significantly impacted the company's inability to obtain ACGB funding over the course of the 1980s. Their reports were also the seeds that would eventually germinate a profound disavowal by the ACGB of all things Cherub.

Hence, Plowman's mention of these "East European films" is tremendously significant, and *Tales from Europe*, while perhaps purporting to be a simple children's series, becomes even more significant the more closely one investigates it. As BBC Radio 4 presenter Chris Bowlby put it in a 2002 documentary on one of the most notorious films of the series, *The Singing Ringing Tree* (*Das singende klingende Bäumchen*), it "looks and sounds – at first – deceptively normal, but within minutes, something very different appears and your life is about to change. […] What's billed as a fairytale becomes fearful, fantastic and still deeply troubling when you're a 40-something."[10]

Tales from Europe was developed to fill a need for children's programs in the BBC's afternoon line-up. For his program, Bowlby interviewed Monica Simms, head of children's programming for the BBC in the late 1960s, who said that since the BBC could not afford to produce programming of its own to fill the gap, it chose to purchase programs from other European countries. Most of the films shown on *Tales from Europe* were heavily subsidized by various European governments, and thus the rights were inexpensive to purchase. Another BBC executive, Edward Barnes, said that after purchasing them, the BBC "would re-edit them into short series, and because we couldn't afford dubbing we'd add narration over the dialogue. This became virtue from necessity, because the viewers could hear the original language and it gave them a taste of other cultures and other worlds."[11]

The Singing Ringing Tree was originally produced in communist East Germany in 1957 and shown on the BBC over three episodes of *Tales from Europe* in 1964. According to Bowlby, it is by far the most well-remembered today. The film is available online in German,[12] and to a present-day viewer, it seems not radically different from the

original *Star Trek* TV series in style. The film begins with a prince arriving to court a very arrogant princess. She discards his gift of a box full of pearls, saying "I require more from a suitor," and eventually demands he bring her "the singing ringing tree." The prince goes in search of the tree and ends up in the kingdom of a dwarf. The malevolent dwarf, whose kingdom most sources describe as appearing "expressionistic," was accompanied by rather industrial-sounding music, and he set some rather severe conditions for surrendering the tree. The prince is eventually turned into a bear and has to remain in dwarf's kingdom, where the princess is eventually also banished after having turned ugly due to her arrogance. Over time, she learns her lesson, and through good works – including saving the tree from the dwarf's trying to burn it – she recovers her beauty, goes off with the restored prince, and everyone presumably lives happily ever after. The film was funded through subsidy from the East German government, though as Bowlby notes, the East German government was ultimately unhappy with the film and felt that the conclusion where the princess and her royal suitor end up together was "too bourgeois."[13] This despite the fact that both of the central characters, and the princess especially, are made to learn their lessons through hard work; in the dwarf's kingdom, neither is royal, they have to build their own shelter and have to survive by living off the land. At the end, though both are restored to their original selves, we only see them leaving the dwarf's kingdom on horseback. We do not know what their lives are to be like, and though presumably they will return to their royal lives at the end, the film was likely cagey about their fate to avoid any censorship. Perhaps this open-endedness allowed audiences in both East Germany and Britain to make of the film what they chose to, and this likely lead to its success in both countries.

The film, though unavailable for many years in the UK, has never been forgotten by those who saw it on television in 1964. Rosemary Creeser, director of Wesbourne Film Distribution, remembered the film from her own childhood and sought to obtain distribution rights (and a print of the film) from East Germany beginning in 1988. Her account of the acquisition process and the subsequent British cinema premiere of the film reveals that *The Singing Ringing Tree* still provoked a substantial amount of nostalgia (both positive and negative) upon its return to British cinemas in 1990. Creeser quotes from audience survey ballots at the film's initial re-screenings, and these reflect both fear of the dwarf and the darker parts of the film ("a dwarf of such terrifying malevolence that he still turns up in my dreams"[14]) as well as joy and delight at what Creeser calls the "utopian" aspects of the film ("a joy to see it again – pure nostalgia for the 60s children in the audience!"[15]).

Creeser attributes the continued fascination with the film to "the social context in which the film was first screened."[16] At the time, British children's television was largely shows like *Blue Peter* (perhaps akin to *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood* or *Captain Kangaroo* in the U.S.) where British people were showing and talking about British things (and where everyone spoke English). Creeser notes that Peggy Miller, *Tales from Europe*'s producer and on-screen host, made the case that in the 1960s, "British children had experienced a starvation of this type of visual fantasy. […Miller] suggests that children in the mid '60s had quite literally never seen anything like *The Singing Ringing Tree* before, and for this reason it left a profound and lasting impression."[17] As one of Bowlby's interviewees put it, the "style of film was not British at all. It was somewhere far away."[18]

What's significant about *The Singing Ringing Tree* is the lingering emotional response to it, and that emotional response to East German films likely informed and shaped the perceptions and judgements of other Eastern European cultural products. All the sources point to a shared cultural memory evoked by the mere mention of the film's title. This perpetual response indicates that Plowman's mention of the series is far more significant than it might appear to be at first. Bowlby's documentary was produced in 2002 at the time that some of the *Tales from Europe* stories were released in the UK on DVD, and alongside a similar article in the *Times*[19] and an earlier story from the *Daily Telegraph,*[20] all testify to the "horror" that the film put into young children in 1964 and how they continue to be shaped by it today. Bowlby calls *The Singing Ringing Tree* one of the "great hidden traumas of our time," and he interviews several people who corroborate his account.

Many of those interviewed indicate that part of what made *The Singing Ringing Tree* so terrifying was that one could hear the strange [German] voices of the original actors along with the overdubbed narration. Plowman himself notes in his report that *Tales from Europe* episodes "seemed always to be dubbed by the same four radio actors," so clearly this had stuck with him nearly 15 years after the series aired. The intent of the series' producers was not to frighten the pants off of British youngsters, but they do seem to be aware of the tremendous impression many of the films screened left on children who watched. Barnes, the program's producer, is quoted in the *Daily Telegraph* as saying "there was a desire to see that children got as wide a cultural diet as possible," even if that meant seeking expressionist children's films from Communist Eastern Europe. Bowlby asked the BBC's Simms about the scariness of the programme, and she

replied:

> [it's] important for children to be exposed to myths and fairy tales and sometimes quite frightening experiences in fantasy programmes where they're far enough divorced from their own surroundings [so as] not to frighten them too badly. They get their frisson from it, but they know it's not exactly happening here. I wrote to a child psychologist [who said] as long as surroundings are not too familiar, it's actually good for children [to be scared by fairytales and] to have nightmares.[21]

Even after creating frissons and nightmares, the wide "cultural diet" that *Tales from Europe* afforded had its impact on a generation of British children. Bowlby notes that several of the people he interviewed about *The Singing Ringing Tree* overcame their fear and developed a fascination with Europe – and Germany in particular – in their adult lives. Julia Tickerage, a primary school teacher, is quoted as saying, "I studied German and I lived in Germany for five years during the '80s – where did that influence come from? I'm sure it was films like *The Singing Ringing Tree.*" Actor Philip Harrison created a stage adaptation of the film, and he was delighted to play the dwarf. "It's a fantastic character to play," he said to Bowlby, "and you've got just boundless areas to go into, and the kids love it."[22]

From his report, it's clear that Plowman did not love *Tales from Europe*, and he did not love Cherub either. Until he makes himself available for an interview, I can only speculate on the significance of *Tales from Europe* in Plowman's adult life, and I admit to imagining him hiding in terror behind the family sofa during an airing of *The Singing Ringing Tree*. But, sadly, in spite of stories of terror from others, I cannot confidently claim that that film or any of the other episodes of *Tales from Europe* terrified Plowman. Clearly he watched the series, though, and his report indicates that he was familiar enough with it to be able to use it as a yardstick for his judgement of *Life is a Dream*'s

merit. Whatever emotional impact the series had on him, it clearly left him with a negative impression of the artistic quality of those Eastern European films. That he used those films as a measure for Cherub's work is significant.

I think it is not accidental that he should specifically recall in his report on *Life is a Dream* the overdubbing of the German actors' lines by the narration of a British actor. In *The Singing Ringing Tree*, the European-ness of the film is foregrounded and is virtually unobscured, with only a hastily-added Britishness (the narration) scrawled over the top of it. I think that a similar case could be made for many of Cherub's productions, especially the early ones like *Life is a Dream* and their next production, *The Two Noble Kinsmen.* As Visnevski himself noted, he felt that he was always trying to marry his Eastern European self with the British milieu he was now in, sometimes uneasily. A Cherub show was like a *Tales from Europe* episode; its European-ness was writ large, and its lack of Britishness was off-putting to some, perhaps even frightening.

What's also significant is that in Plowman and Lamede's reports the company is often patronizingly described. Though Plowman is only two years older than Visnevski, and, based on available information Lamede can't be more than 10 years older, they often refer to Visnevski and Cherub as "young" and compare the company's actors to "students" in their reports. Clearly, their status as drama officers at the Arts Council allowed them to see themselves as significantly above those who would in any other context be their peers. Undoubtedly, the association with Eastern Europe – which, until recently, was referred, even in scholarly accounts as "backwards" – and even more specifically, with these Eastern European children's films, made it even easier for them to view Cherub and its productions as less-than capable.

Any criticism of Cherub in the early ACGB reports matters a great deal, because the Arts Council used a compilation of such reports to determine whether or not a company should receive subsidy. Whenever a company applied for subsidy, all the reports in their file were reviewed, and an assessment of a company's work was based on the entirety of its output over time, not just the most recent. Another drama officer, "JAB" – as yet unidentified – wrote in his report on *Life is a Dream*, "I understand that they are likely to be asking for a project grant later in the year, and my feeling is that this group of artists, though commendably enterprising and resourceful, should not yet be expecting assistance from public funds. They ought all to get themselves jobs."[23] Later that year, Cherub did indeed seek subsidy for the first time, and with the reports on *Life is a Dream,* the ACGB staff saw them as a "young" company and who needed to learn certain lessons. A common theme throughout the years and years of reports filed for the ACGB on Cherub's productions is the idea that they weren't "ready" yet for public subsidy.

The Drama Department of the ACGB offered two main types of subsidy: an annual grant, which would fund the company's activities for an entire season, or a project grant, which would fund a specific project. Usually, the ACGB liked to fund artists on a project-by-project basis before opting to provide annual subsidy. After all, part of the four-fold mission of the ACGB was "to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts," and the ACGB claimed to like to see a clear sense of "development" in a company's work. For the ACGB, annual subsidy was granted only in the most extraordinary cases, usually only when a company achieved a sufficient level of artistic "success." If a company reached this target and was granted annual subsidy, that

company usually became a regular and sustained client of the ACGB. This practice was known as "the Goodman doctrine," so called by Lord Eccles, Conservative Paymaster General and Minister of the Arts in the early 1970s and named after former Arts Council chairman Lord Arnold Goodman.[24] As chairman, Goodman had taken to heart what Arts Council Secretary General William Emrys Williams had said years before: "Public patronage of the arts is a long-term obligation: it must grow like the mustard-seed, not like the beanstalk,"[25] and his leadership guided the ACGB firmly in this direction.

The ACGB's staff, particularly Lamede and Plowman, seems to have felt that they had to slap down this company they saw as a young upstart, especially since they had disliked Cherub's first production. In its initial applications, Cherub did not understand the Council's "development" model, and it had applied directly for an annual subsidy. Perhaps Visnevski's expectation was that "subsidy" in Britain was similar to subsidy in Poland, and that the expectation was that art was allowed to develop free from "market and economic pressures," as Stefan Toepler has broadly described the Eastern European communist system.[26] Grotowski's early productions, after all, had been relatively unpopular with audiences (and some critics), so much so that the town of Opole decided that his theatre really didn't belong there anymore. The company, however, was not cut off completely, and a special government committee recommended that the company move to the town of Wroclaw which could better accommodate it, which it did in 1965.[27] This type of government support was never on offer in Britain for Cherub, the young, upstart company. While allowing theatre companies "the right to fail" might have been part of the ACGB's intent, it was not a blanket policy. The government did not provide enough money for the ACGB to give money to everyone who applied; decisions

and priorities had to be made and followed.

That some were offered guidance and others were not is problematic, and it likely tended to disenfranchise specific groups of artists. As Naseem Kahn pointed out in a 1976 report on ethnic-based theatre commissioned by the ACGB, "to many native-British, the workings of the town hall are arcane and mysterious. For new-British they are doubly so – a fact that should be recognized and accommodated."[28] Though Visnevski had been in the UK for many years, he had never had to think about applying for subsidy before, and the mistakes the company made with the ACGB in its early years were likely due to the mystery of the process. Later, in part due to Khan's report, the ACGB saw a necessity in altering its way of working with ethnic companies; however, because Cherub was not strictly a Polish company (its performances were in English with English actors), nor were its performers of a different race, it didn't fall under the ACGB's "token" policies.

The ACGB's staff didn't give Cherub any leeway upon Visnevski's submitting the early applications for annual grants. In a rather patronizing tone, Lamede wrote in a letter to Visnevski that the usual procedure was for a company to be funded from project to project and then after a time, possibly receive annual funding. He also noted:

> To be quite frank, now that several of the Council's officers have seen your first production, I do think that the New Applications and Projects Committee would want to see more of your work before recommending subsidy on any basis. … There is a great deal of new work and comparatively little subsidy available, and the artistic standards have to be very high before subsidy can be offered.[29]

Note that while the ACGB's staff was fine with telling Cherub it was bad, they did not feel like they needed to assist the company directly to improve its quality. Any specific criticism levied against Cherub's productions never made it to Cherub, though Visnevski

constantly asked to know specifically what the ACGB objected to in his work. The ACGB's show reports were confidential. The obvious question is begging: how is a company supposed to develop so-called higher artistic standards without any guidance from the ACGB on how to get there? The only answer is that in spite of claiming to want to "improve" the work of artists as part of its stated mission, the ACGB's staff actively prevented companies from improving when their own personal assessment was negative. In Cherub's case, Lamede and Plowman didn't want Cherub to succeed because their own expectations told them that the company shouldn't.

The Problem of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

Just as the reviews for *Life is a Dream* are key in understanding how the ACGB's staff viewed Cherub, so too are those reports on the company's production of Shakespeare's collaboration with John Fletcher, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. The company premiered *Kinsmen* with a successful run at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in the summer of 1979, followed by a run later in the year at the Young Vic Studio. Some of the drama officers' and panelists' reports for *Kinsmen* provide evidence of the existence of the narrow lens through which the ACGB came to view Cherub's productions. Because it did not meet any of their personal expectations and could not comfortably be fitted into any of their standard categories, the drama officers were constantly seeking to situate Cherub's work through their understanding of other theatre artists, those both British and foreign.

With *Life is a Dream*, the Council's officers unfavorably compared the company's work with East European movies from the 1960s and the work of director

Jerzy Grotowski. In reports on *Kinsmen*, they invoked comparisons with another noted director; in his report on *Kinsmen*, Plowman would castigate Cherub for attempting the "visual theatre" of Peter Brook. Although Brook is still widely seen as one of the foremost theatre practitioners in Britain in the 20th century, in the years after he left England in 1970 for France, many questions were raised in Britain about his departure and the type of work he was undertaking in Europe that he couldn't do in Britain. Brook's own desire to seek alternate modes of performance, as well as funding streams to support the work, had led him to France. British theatre has always had a somewhat uneasy relationship with European performance traditions[‡] and has largely either taken what it found valuable from Europe and modified it for its own ends (the formal characteristics but not the political impact of Brecht, for example) or performed it in much the way it has other world dramatic forms: as a curiosity. The drama officer reports reveal that Cherub was seen as a "European" company, and for the ACGB, this was not a positive determination.

Though the ACGB did not like *Kinsmen* – Plowman, in his review, called it "jerk-off theatre" – newspaper critics in both London and Edinburgh had anointed the production "a revelation." This disparity points out something very significant about Bourdieu's symbolic violence: because agreement is never universal, a production can be judged by two different people as both "good" and "bad," setting up a confrontation between two groups for who has the right to define. What's striking in this case is the disjunction itself: the very fact that Cherub's productions were both widely praised by the newspaper reviewers and at the same time panned by the ACGB's staff. This is in certain

[‡] See Rebellato's *1956 And All That* for a discussion of a perceived foreign invasion (esp. French) onto British stages in the mid-1950s.

ways inexplicable, though analyzing the ACGB's reports has proved elucidating as to why they despised Cherub's work so much. The ACGB, with its strong control over Britain's artistic purse-strings, considered itself as the Great Arbiter of British culture. Ultimately, though the newspapers loved Cherub's work, they did not fund it, and without the backing of the ACGB and its money, Cherub could not succeed.

Though they had previously opened *Life is a Dream*, in many ways it is appropriate to see *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as the first truly "Cherub" show. With *Life is a Dream*, the company was a product of both Chandler and Visnevski; with *Kinsmen*, Visnevski was on his own. Where Visnevski wanted to be avant garde, Chandler had wished to produce more mainstream work, and as perhaps a portent of what was to come, compromise between the two proved impossible. With a minimum of fuss, Chandler opted to leave the company after *Dream*, and Visnevski alone pushed ahead with plans for Cherub. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can be seen as an ironic parallel to the fledgling company. The play, like Cherub itself, has always been tough to pigeonhole because it defies so many of the categories associated with Shakespeare's plays. In her introductory essay to the Arden edition of *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Lois Potter describes the play as "a Jacobean dramatization of a medieval English tale based on an Italian romance version of a Latin epic about one of the oldest and most tragic Greek legends; it has two authors and two heroes."[30] The conflicted and contested history of the play between the 17th and 20th centuries parallels in many ways the complicated existence of the Cherub Company after 1979.

Potter's mention of the play's multiple authors is key, for the authorship question forms the basis of the fraught position of the play. Though some scholars still question

the extent to which Shakespeare was involved in the construction of *Kinsmen*, it is now generally recognized that his contribution was significant. Misattribution in copyright records back in the 17th century caused the play for at least 200 years to be considered the work of John Fletcher either alone or with any number of other authors, including both his common collaborator Francis Beaumont and Shakespeare. The play was not included in the vaunted *First Folio* compiled by John Heminges and Henry Condell in 1623 (several other Shakespeare-penned plays were not included due to copyright difficulties or poor extant scripts). As Potter notes, most of the scholarly research has been to ascertain what (if anything) in *Kinsmen* was written by Shakespeare (not vice versa). In other words, Shakespeare scholars have often sought to separate Shakespeare's wheat from Fletcher's chaff.

Potter herself raises the issues around a collaboratively-written text, often a problem for scholars because the very process of creation subverts the search for "authorial intent." The Romantic ideal of the "artist genius" allows historians to erase the contributions of others such as any editors (both those that worked with and after the author), typesetters, spouses, friends, etc., by saying that even if others were involved, the Author took all of the others' contributions and made a final product, and ultimately this is the only way a true work of art is created. This emphasis on the final "product" of an artistic work has a tendency to erase (or at least obscure) the "process" of its creation. The true "work" of creation (the editing, revising, comments, suggestions, borrowings) is subsumed in the final act of placing a single author's name on a publication. Performance also allows for a similar erasure because the ultimate work of creation is ascribed to the director at the helm; he or she is responsible for the product before us,

effectively obscuring, if not erasing, the collaboration that was required to make it final.

This is true, in part, because works with multiple authors cannot be easily pigeonholed. They are examples of more free-flowing texts, where collaboration and editing mediate between authorial intention (if such a thing exists as far as dramatic works go) and the end result. It's a fascinating example of the continual tension between process and product, for rather than being specifically product, a play like *Kinsmen* is more of a process document where polish was not possible or is at least not discernable. Historically, literary scholars of Shakespeare's works were particularly fond of the "written by Shakespeare" label, and *Kinsmen* could not be seen to easily fit into this category. The continued focus on the artist-genius and the erasures it causes are also significant components of how the ACGB understood Cherub's production of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. In *Kinsmen*'s case, the process of creation between two authors had caused the ultimate product (the text) to be deemed of lesser value by historians. In Cherub's case, the attribution of much of the work to a single individual (Visnevski) erased the contributions of other artists, and allowed the production (as well as others) to be minimalized by the ACGB as the product of authorial directing gone wrong.

Fletcher himself is also a problematic figure, since he often undertook collaborations and most of his notable plays were written with someone else. He did author a number of plays on his own, and he edited or revised the plays of several playwrights, including Shakespeare. To compound the issue of why *Kinsmen* was viewed as a "bad play," especially when Shakespeare's contributions were more in doubt, Fletcher was often considered "the lesser writer" in the pairings he was in. Potter notes that "Fletcher often appears in indexes, bibliographies and library catalogues only with

the cross-reference, 'See Beaumont, Francis.'" Potter wraps this in a feminist argument: "Collaboration is 'like marriage,' […] and those who use this comparison are irresistibly drawn to distinguish the male and female halves of the partnership. […] The most easily recognizable feature of Fletcher's style is his use of 'feminine endings' (unstressed final syllables) eventually led to an extraordinary conflation of aesthetic and moral judgements on his work."[31] Specifically in terms of the production of *Kinsmen,* Potter writes that "[William Spalding] and his immediate successors focused [their analysis of the play] mainly on metre, predictably contrasting 'the flowing style of Fletcher' with 'the more manly one of Shakespeare."[32]

The process of "Othering" Fletcher that Potter describes is significant, for it foregrounds the way that agents within the field of cultural production separate the acceptable from that which is not. The ACGB's staff would similarly place Cherub in the position of Other, viewing the company as an example of unacceptable theatrical practice. Visnevski's desire to alter theatrical practice, or at least theatrical presentation, places the company in an alternative position by its own choice. Cherub defies and eludes the typical mainstream/alternative binary, though, and while one can see their work as having political elements,[§] unlike most of the other alternative companies, they did not seek to provoke revolutionary social change. Cherub's productions, however, were considered by the ACGB alongside the work of companies like WTG, 7.84 and Interaction, all of whom can be fitted much more comfortably into the "alternative" box. What's more, all of these companies were founded by British artists, all of whom had

[§] A specific response to political theatre that begins to emerge in the 1990s was that "all theatre is inherently political." This is especially associated with analyses of "In Yer Face" artists like Sarah Kane, Mark Ravenhill and David Greig. Greig himself evokes the sentiment in an essay in Rebecca D'Monté and Graham Saunders, *Cool Britannia: British Political Drama in the 1990s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

been raised within the British cultural field and who had a specific understanding of British theatre. Cherub, unlike its alternative peers who sought political revolution, aimed to provoke a revolution in British theatrical practice. Where many of the political plays performed by the left-wing companies were based in realism, Cherub instead sought to utilize more theatrical performance styles, and that they chose classical (mostly English) texts to do this work was especially troubling to the ACGB.

The company's approach presented a two-fold problem for the ACGB's staff: Cherub did not match the typical company who was usually funded as an alternative theatre company, and its desire to work in an avant-garde and Eastern European performance mode had the potential to unsettle conventional British performance. In most of the ACGB agents' reports and correspondence, they clearly lay out a perception that, should the company succeed at this unsettling, it would disrupt not only accepted standards for performance but also deeply-held notions for what was good or bad in British theatre. As I have previously noted, this was a province the ACGB and its agents had specifically reserved for themselves.

Where Potter's opening salvo presents *Kinsmen* as a conflicting, difficult entity which does not fit comfortably in historical categorizations for Shakespeare's plays, I find it useful to develop a similar description for Cherub. Cherub was a British alternative theatre company that avoided blatantly left-wing political plays and performed English and European classic texts using Eastern European and historically avant-garde techniques on self-funded tours throughout the British Isles and on government-funded tours to countries like Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan and Ethiopia on behalf of the British Council; it was founded by a Polish expatriate, hired British actors and crew, and survived for 25

years without any consistent financial support. My sentence aims to describe why Cherub did not receive government funding, just as Potter's explains why *Kinsmen* was largely ignored for 300 years. It was an alternative company which did not do alternative work; it presented classic plays but it utilized "foreign" techniques which often did not maintain the integrity of the text; it had to scrimp and save to produce its work within the UK because the ACGB wouldn't fund it, but it was often supported by the British Council to take its work overseas. Ultimately, it was a British company that wasn't British, one that tried to resuscitate "neglected classics" – a move the ACGB could potentially have rewarded. But the means by which Cherub went about their resuscitation caused the ACGB no end of consternation. No reward was offered. The ACGB's staff's response to the production of *Two Noble Kinsmen* is a large reason why.

Cherub's *Kinsmen*

Two Noble Kinsmen was one of the classics that Visnevski saw as having been neglected, and while many critics were happy to see it dusted off, the ACGB wasn't so thrilled. By 1978 only ten major productions[**] of the play had appeared in the UK during the 20th century; most accounts list the 1928 Old Vic production as one of the first since Shakespeare's day, and indeed it billed itself as such.[33] The critics were not generally kind to the Old Vic's revival; one noted, "that the piece appears to have been left unacted since its birth is evidence of wisdom rather than of negligence among actors of the

[**] These productions include only four professional productions, the others being university productions and one radio version by the BBC. They are: March 1928 – Old Vic; 1936 – public reading by Nottingham Shakespeare Society; 1955 – Birmingham University Theatre Group at Edinburgh Festival Fringe; 1956 – BBC radio play version; June 1959 – University of Reading Drama Society in Open Air Theatre, Avonbank Gardens, Stratford-upon-Avon; July 1964 – Bristol University; 1968 – Interluders of Hereford performance in Devon; 1970 – modern-dress production in London (for British Council); 12 July 1973 – York Theatre Royal; Oct. 1974 – Regent's Park. The Royal Shakespeare Company did not produce the play until 1986.

past."[34] Hugh Richmond indicates in his production history of the play that the comedy within the tragicomic form was specifically accentuated in this production, and the *Times* critic noted that the actors playing the Kinsmen got "more laughter than, we will wager, his dramatist bargained for."[35] Needless to say, the Old Vic's production didn't trigger an upsurge in productions of the play; it would not see another professional production until the 1970s.

Because the play is so rarely done, Cherub's production is often listed in production histories, noted mostly for featuring an all-male cast. Newspaper critics responded to its arresting visual style, which Visnevski created in association with Polish artist Feliks Topolski. Visnevski, quoted in an *Evening Standard* article on the production, explained, "Feliks and I looked through the play and were immediately struck by the modern, punkish theme. So the leather and chains, the spiky hair and violent colours seemed appropriate. The codpieces lay great stress on the virility of the men."[36] Topolski had himself relocated to London, though in the 1930s, and he spent the remainder of his career in England. He served as something of a mentor to Visnevski, and Topolski would continue his association with Cherub by creating poster designs and sketching rehearsals and performances for the next several years.

Cherub's production opened at the University Chaplaincy Center as part of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on August 27, 1979, and toured to a couple of regional theatres before opening in London at the Young Vic with a slightly different cast (the actors playing the kinsmen and the Jailer's Daughter were not available) in November.
I think it's essential to attempt a partial reconstruction of Cherub's production of *Kinsmen*. Obviously, I must focus on specific details of the production and cannot

reconstruct the actions of the actors. This is unfortunate because their performances are one of the primary bones of contention between the various auditors. Many of the critics, also indicate that they have no prior reference for the production. Where one, when reviewing *Hamlet*, might think back over the long line of sensational (and terrible) Hamlets one has seen, these critics were aware they had no Palamon or Hippolyta with which to compare. Some of them do seem to have expectations given that it was written partly by Shakespeare, but because they'd never experienced the play before, most of them managed to keep a somewhat open mind, though their interpretations of what they saw ranged widely. The ACGB's reviewers are an altogether different question, and I'll deal with their responses later.

The play is a retelling of Chaucer's "Knights Tale," set in Ancient Greece, and is an interesting amalgamation of various popular Shakespearean characters and settings. The original version features a Prologue, which Visnevski chose to cut, one of many cuts to the script which the critics noted, indicating that they many of them had at least read the script before attending. From the top of Act I, the actors playing the upper class characters were shirtless and wore black leather pants and boots, the male characters adding codpieces to denote their maleness and the female Amazons with a woman's breast painted over their own left breast (a nod to the assumption that Amazon warriors had their right breast removed to improve their accuracy with a bow). The non-royal characters wore burlap sacks.[††] In the first scene (figure 1), Theseus and Hippolyta took part in a somewhat Bacchanalian wedding procession (featuring masked actors playing Hyman and various nymphs), and which featured a wedding song:

[††] Though perhaps not a direct reference, the burlap sacks the Cherub actors wore were strikingly similar to those worn by the actors in Grotowski's production of *Akropolis* (1962).

Roses, their sharp spines being gone,
Not royal in their smells alone,
But in their hue;
Maiden pinks, of odor faint,
Daisies smell-less, yet most quaint,
And sweet thyme true;
[…]
The crow, the sland'rous cuckoo, nor
The boding raven, nor chough hoar,
Nor chatt'ring pie,
May on our bridehouse perch or sing,
Or with them any discord bring,
But from it fly.[37]

Figure 1 - The masked satyrs surround Hippolyta (Martin Ransley), bottom right. (Edinburgh, 1979)

At this moment, the song was interrupted by discord: three queens shrouded in black (figure 2), who – after *Antigone* – pleaded with Theseus to come to defeat Creon in Thebes, because Creon would not allow their dead to be buried. After pleading from the Queens and from Hippolyta, her sister Emilia, and Theseus' friend Pirithous, Theseus agreed. The next scene introduced the two kinsmen, Palamon and Arcite, and these actors, in addition to the same black leather trousers, also had wildly-colored hair. The production photos do not reflect that, but one unsourced review in the Cherub archive

lists hair dyed yellow (Arcite) and violet (Palamon). The two kinsmen are relatives of Creon in Thebes, and their plans to escape the city were changed when news of Theseus' attack came and they agreed to take up arms.

Figure 2 - The three queens plead with Theseus (Nigel Miles-Thomas), center. (Edinburgh, 1979)

Next, Pirithous said his goodbyes to Emilia and Hippolyta before going off to join Theseus in battle. After he left, the women talked about the two men's friendship, and Emilia recalled a girlhood friendship she had. This monologue, seen by many literary scholars as one of the many queer moments in the play,[⌗⌗] had Emilia saying "that the true love 'tween any maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual."[38] That in Cherub's production these lines were said by a man playing a woman to another man playing a woman, caused Gerald Berkowitz to write in *Shakespeare Quarterly* that cuts to the text

[⌗⌗] Robert Brustein has said of the play, "It contains sexual ambiguities – Emilia's speech about 'the true love 'tween maid and maid' and Arcite's remark to Palamon about how 'we are one another's wife' – that could be cited in support of recent rulings on gay marriage." See Robert Brustein, "Shakespeare in Bloom" *The New Republic* 15 Dec 2003: 32.

and the production's design pointed to "the fact that the real couples in the main plot are the two women and the two men."[39] I'm not entirely clear which characters Berkowitz was referring to, and possibly that's due to the deliberate pairing and repairing that Shakespeare and Fletcher achieve in the show.

In this scene, the pairs discussed are Theseus and Pirithous and Emilia and her long-lost friend. Emilia and Hippolyta (figure 3) are also a pair (they often appear together and are sisters), and of course, Palamon and Arcite are the titular pair (and presumably one of those to which Berkowitz refers). Indeed, Theseus and Pirithous' relationship, as described in this scene, serves to clarify that between Palamon and Arcite, and one could read Emilia's relationship with her lost friend in the same way. Hippolyta and Theseus are also a pair, since the celebration of their wedding is where the play starts, and pairings of the Jailer's Daughter and Palamon, the Daughter and the Wooer, and the problematic potential in the pairings between Arcite and Emilia, and Palamon and Emilia. Visnevski's production had cut the number of characters down to 13 from the script's 26 (plus assorted attendants, "maids, country wenches and nymphs") and leaving aside the Theban queens, the Jailer and the Doctor, the remaining eight characters are all paired and repaired in the script. In casting all men, and in having the actors display their own masculinity (their chests) throughout, Visnevski makes all of these pairings additionally complicated, particularly those between men and women.

After Theseus wins the battle, the queens buried their dead (figure 4), and Visnevski staged the dirge scene with actors playing the dead bodies, their faces covered with muslin sacks. In battle, Palamon and Arcite were wounded, and in recognition of their fighting, though they were on the opposing side, Theseus demands they be tended to

prior to their imprisonment.

Figure 3 - Hippolyta, left, and Emilia (Charles Grant). (Edinburgh, 1979)

Figure 4 - The queens bury their dead. (Edinburgh, 1979)

After a brief scene introducing the non-royal characters of the sub-plot – the Jailer, the Wooer and the Jailer's Daughter – Palamon and Arcite were seen in jail, taken care of by the Daughter. Feeling despondent about their plight, they dedicated themselves to one another:

> **Arcite**: Shall we make worthy uses of this place
> That all men hate so much?
> **Palamon**: How, gentle cousin?
> **Arcite**: Let's think this prison holy sanctuary,
> To keep us from corruption of worse men.
> […]
> And here being thus together,
> We are an endless mine to one another;
> We are one another's wife, ever begetting
> New births of love; we are father, friends, acquaintance;
> We are in one another families;
> I am your heir, and you are mine. This place
> Is our inheritance.
> […]
> **Palamon**: Is there any record of any two that loved
> Better than we do, Arcite?
> **Arcite**: Sure there cannot.
> **Palamon**: I do not think it possible our friendship
> Should ever leave us.
> **Arcite**: Till our deaths it cannot.[40]

Perhaps having spoken too soon, Palamon and Arcite's coupling (figure 5) is almost immediately broken up by both of their hopes for a pairing with Emilia. As the kinsmen pledged their love, Emilia and her servant entered below; Cherub's production used the Jailer's Daughter as a confidant for Emilia rather than a servant. Palamon saw Emilia out the window and fell instantly in love. Once again, Cherub's choice to have Emilia played by a man created quite a frisson, one that Shakespeare and Fletcher probably did not intend. The leather-clad, shirtless Palamon gazed down at a leather-clad, shirtless Emilia and declared, "By heaven, she is a goddess." Arcite eventually saw her too, and instantly, the two men began to argue over her. As they came to blows, the Jailer entered

to remove Arcite, who has been banished, effecting the kinsmen's physical separation.

Figure 5 - Palamon (Paul Hegarty), standing, cradles Arcite (David Acton). (1979-80 revival production – photo: Chris Pearce)

Interspersed throughout the next couple of acts, the Jailer's Daughter (figure 6) delivered several long soliloquies. In II-4, she described her love for Palamon, and in II-6, she described how she has freed Palamon, who then fled and left her behind. Between these soliloquies, Arcite, disguised, won a wrestling match and got invited to meet Theseus, at which time Pirithous commanded Arcite to serve Emilia. Visnevski cut the extra characters in Acts II and III, where Shakespeare and Fletcher contrived to have many country folk, led by a pompous schoolmaster (as in *Love's Labour's Lost*), present a morris dance for Theseus and his train. The cuts allowed the production to focus instead on the pairings and their complications. In her soliloquies, the Jailer's Daughter wandered through the woods, progressively driven crazy by her love for Palamon.

Elsewhere in the woods, Palamon and Arcite reencountered each other, and Palamon attempted to strangle Arcite (figure 7) with the prison chains he still had around his wrists. Ultimately, he could not kill his friend, though his rhetoric was still quite fiery. Arcite tried to placate Palamon, who will have none of it. Arcite then left – the act features many comings and goings – though he promised to return first with food for Palamon and later with weapons and armor so that the two can settle their argument.

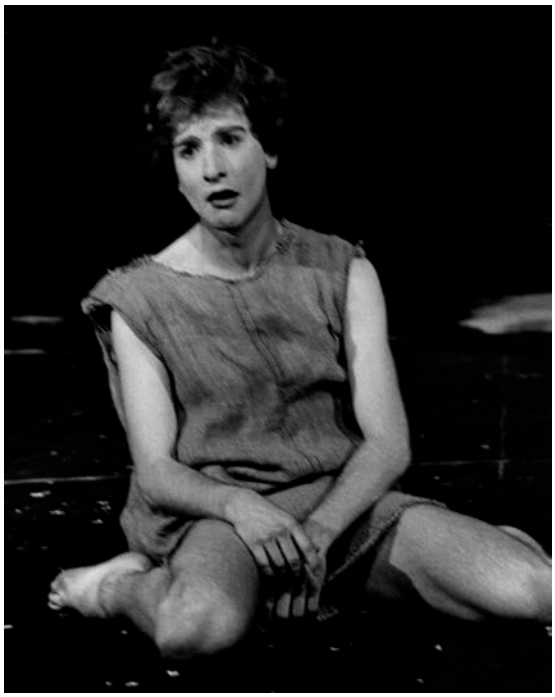

Figure 6 - The Jailer's Daughter (Anthony Best).
(1979-80 revival production - photo: Chris Pearce)

In Cherub's production, the two kinsmen's combat in Act III, Scene 6, became a very serious-looking knife fight (figure 8). Shakespeare and Fletcher's play has the two kinsmen breaking their chivalric vows of fealty to each other and fighting in a gentlemanly duel after assisting each other in putting on their armor. As they arm, they remember some of their glory days in battle. "Methinks this armor's very like that, Arcite / Thou wor'st that day the three kings fell, but lighter," Palamon says. Arcite

replies, “That was a very good one, and that day / I well remember you outdid me, cousin.”[41] Visnevski pared down their remembrances, moving the action more swiftly to the inevitable fight. Cherub’s kinsmen were not clad in medieval armor; they added leather chest plates as “armor,” but they were still only clad in their leather pants and were basically shirtless. With their knives, the fight lost its chivalric aspect and took on the qualities of a street fight between rival gang members. The two men were bent on killing one another, and the violence in the production was shown to be immediate and totally dangerous; love could quickly turn to murderous rage.

Figure 7 - Palamon (Daniel Foley) strangles Arcite (Anthony Rothe). (Edinburgh, 1979)

Figure 8 - Palamon (Foley, at left) and Arcite (Rothe) fight with knives. (Edinburgh, 1979)

The fight was interrupted by Theseus and his train, and as the fight was against the law, Theseus threatened to punish them with death. Palamon explained that they were fighting over Emilia, and for the second time in the play, Hippolyta and Emilia pleaded with Theseus for mercy. Theseus demanded that Emilia choose between the two; the one she chose would be spared, the other would be executed. Emilia said she couldn't choose between them, and Theseus arranged for them to wrestle over Emilia. The one who won would have Emilia, the other would die. This somewhat draconian solution to the ultimate pairing with Emilia allowed the playwrights to ratchet up the tension for the remainder of the play and allowed a new focus on Emilia. In Act IV, Emilia appeared with pictures of the two kinsmen, torn between two men she hardly knew. "What a mere child is Fancy," she said, "That having two fair gawds of equal sweetness / Cannot distinguish, but must cry for both!"[42] Her guilt was profound, and she was not persuaded by Theseus and Hippolyta's claims that the match would

necessarily end the conflict. "Poor wench," she told herself, "go weep, for whosoever wins / Loses a noble cousin, for thy sins."[43]

The complexity of the pairings and repairings was uneasily resolved in Acts IV and V. The Jailer's Daughter wished to be paired with Palamon (and indeed went crazy because of it), though she was already being pursued by the Wooer, who, on a doctor's advice, eventually pretended to be Palamon to cure her of her madness. The Wooer dressed in leather pants and pretended to court the Jailer's Daughter as if he were Palamon. On her last appearance, she appeared to have fully accepted the Wooer as Palamon, and they made plans to wed, thus apparently resolving the sub-plot:

> **Wooer**: Come, sweet, we'll go to dinner
> And then we'll play at cards.
> **Daughter**: And shall we kiss too?
> **Wooer**: An hundred times.
> **Daughter**: And twenty?
> **Wooer**: Ay, and twenty.
> **Daughter**: And then we'll sleep together.
> **Doctor**: Take her offer.
> **Wooer**: Yes, marry, will we.[44]

The intimacy (especially the kissing) in the relationship between the male Wooer and the male/female Jailer's Daughter was mentioned by several of the newspaper critics. Censorship had ended only 11 years earlier, after all, and homosexual love was still relatively novel on British stages.[§§] One reviewer wrote, "nowadays one accepts that sexuality is made quite explicit on stage. However when all the players are men things

[§§] Specifically gay companies like Gay Sweatshop, which was touring its productions *Mr X* (1975) and *As Time Goes By* (1978), were actively performing at this time, attempting to bring homosexual storylines to the stage. The appearance of homosexuality in the theatre was not without controversy. From October-December of 1980, the production of Howard Brenton's *The Romans in Britain* appeared at the National Theatre, directed by Michael Bogdanov. The play featured the homosexual rape of a Celt by a Roman soldier, and while the rape was simulated and not literal, moralistic gadfly Mary Whitehouse filed charges of indecency against Bogdanov for directing the scene. While the prosecution was ultimately abandoned, the judge in the case ruled that simulated acts in the theatre could be considered for prosecution as indecent acts, setting a precedent that has not yet been overturned in British law (though no additional prosecutions have been brought).

can perhaps be taken a bit too far. This was the case with the madness of the Jailer's Daughter."[45]

The resolution to the Kinsmen-Emilia pairing was more complicated. Emilia refused to attend the wrestling match, and Visnevski had Pirithous come and go from the fight to bring Emilia news. The fight was written to be heard from off, and Visnevski had the company stand upstage, their backs turned, to create the sounds of the fight. Emilia was still concerned, and when it initially appears that Palamon has won, she felt guilty that perhaps her wearing his photo on her left side helped him win to Arcite's detriment. Eventually, though Pirithous announced that Arcite had won. Arcite returned with Theseus et al, and Theseus gave Emilia to Arcite, as per the bargain. Emilia was still unsettled, though. More than any of the other characters in the play, Emilia understood the consequences of the fight between Arcite and Palamon, especially because she also had to contend with those very consequences. Shakespeare and Fletcher have had her ill at ease through all of Act V, worrying constantly about which knight she would end up marrying, but this was more than girlish vacillation (especially since in Cherub's production, "she" wasn't exactly a girl). She, like the kinsmen, had few choices in Theseus' kingdom, and she perhaps felt that she squandered a rare opportunity to resolve the conflict. Her earlier reluctance to choose between the two men had led to the duel, and now that a winner had been declared, the other would have to die. She expressed her dilemma:

> **Emilia:** Is this winning?
> Oh all you heavenly powers, where is your mercy?
> But that your wills have said it must be so,
> And charge me live to comfort this unfriended,
> This miserable Prince, that cuts away
> A life more worthy from him then all women,

I should, and would, die too.[46]

Within Cherub's production, the audience was doubly aware that these lines were spoken by a female character as played by a male body. How the audience interpreted Emilia's wish to die because she'd gotten in between Arcite and "a life more worthy… than all women" depends entirely on how fully they bought into the convention. In any case, the triangulation of the relationship left Emilia in a difficult position: she recognized that her position is that of being in between two long-time friends, and not only did she not have the ability to choose whether she wanted to be married, but whoever she ended up with would be miserable and lonely for a friend who was dead. All of the characters, Emilia included, saw the relationship between the two kinsmen as paramount to any other. In Cherub's production, the temptation to read this relationship as more than simply friendship was clearly heightened by the costume of the male characters, and not interrupted by the virtually similar costumes of the female characters. Where Visnevski's intent may not have been a queer one, one can easily see how some in the audience may have interpreted the production as being "gay."

Whether read by the audience as male or female, though, Emilia was stuck in between a rock and a hard place: the character was required to marry a man that she had not expressly chosen, and the production did not alter or mitigate this requirement. She did not make it clear if she was happy about the situation or not, only that she was guilty about splitting the kinsmen apart. In the final scene, as the preparations were begun for Arcite and Emilia's wedding, Palamon was in jail, awaiting execution. He met the Jailer, who told Palamon of his daughter's impending marriage and supposed recovery of health. Palamon was then led to his execution, and as he set his head on the execution

block, Pirithous came in to halt the proceedings. Pirithous said that Arcite had been mortally wounded; having been "Mounted upon a steed that Emily / Did first bestow on him," the horse spooked and trampled him.[47]

Significantly, it was Emilia's gift that killed Arcite. Perhaps seen as a divine intervention in the play, within the context of Cherub's more contemporary production, I wonder if it might have been seen as a deliberate choice on Emilia's part, thus allowing her a measure of agency at the end of the play. The horse was reportedly pure black and that "many will not buy / His goodness with this note," meaning that many were wary about the horse and its potential connection to evil omens. Pirithous confirmed this when he said "which superstition / Here finds allowance,"[48] referring to the "here" of the trampling of Arcite. Did Emilia choose a bad horse to give to Arcite, and was this a choice she made in the only way she could? She had to at least have been aware that suspicion surrounded the black horse, and perhaps she was merely tempting fate by offering that particular horse to Arcite. She might have merely ordered servants to give Arcite any horse, not knowing which they would choose, but there were few servants in Cherub's production, and with the contemporary setting, that potential may not at first leap to the audience's mind. Emilia gave nothing away, and her only response after Arcite is brought in to say his farewells (figure 9)—indeed her only line in the final scene of the play—revealed little:

> **Emilia**: I'll close thine eyes, Prince. Blessed souls be with thee!
> Thou art a right good man, and while I live,
> This day I give to tears.[49]

With his dying breath, Arcite gave Emilia to Palamon, and the play ends.

Cherub's production left open two huge questions, both related to the women in

the play. Since the Jailer's Daughter did not appear again, the audience cannot be sure that she's truly been cured, or even if she was even recovered to the point where knows that she was not marrying Palamon. Secondly, was Emilia satisfied with her marriage at the end? Whether or not she was, she remained in the same predicament she articulated earlier: she was to be married to a man who was grieving over the death of a friend. Cherub's production left the audience with a tragic final picture, with Palamon "openly expressing grief," Visnevski told me,[50] and so the audience would have been responsible for either buying into the "all is well" comedic conclusion that Shakespeare and Fletcher offer, or to think and question more deeply about some of the lingering questions that remained. By raising certain questions about the nature of the play, Cherub's production deliberately prompted others, and that no doubt led to the diverse opinions between the newspaper critics and the ACGB's staff.

Figure 9 - Palamon (Hegarty) says his goodbye to Arcite (Acton). (1980 revival tour)

A Masturbatory Fantasy

The blatant sexuality in the production amazed the newspaper critics, who were as satisfied with *Two Noble Kinsmen* as they had been about *Life is a Dream*:

> Black leather and chains. Actors' shadows against white walls. Short-haired, bare-chested men with painted red and white circles around their nipples, playing Emilia and Hippolyta. Cod-pieces hand-made by the director. Spasms of fighting and kissing. Gay group therapy through the medium of Shakespeare and Fletcher? Not at all. Cherub Company's startling all-male production […] is a revelation, through visual art, of the work's essential bitter brutality.[51]

> [The] company are all male and all young and all dressed in black "leather" trousers with only a suitable decoration to indicate their status. The women have a circle painted round the left breast; the men wear protuberant codpieces. The difference between the sexes is thus shown to be merely a stage convention, the love between the several pairs a dramatic machinery […] Charles Grant as Emilia and Martin Ransley as Hippolyta do not pretend to be anything but men in women's makeup, and there is no hint of embarrassment about their endearments with [the two kinsmen] Anthony Rothe (Arcite) and Daniel Foley (Palamon). Even the more intimate scenes between Anthony Best as the jailer's daughter and Tom Hunsinger as the warder are free from awkwardness.[52]

While the newspaper reviewers were generally praiseworthy of the production, the ACGB reviewers were not. Plowman wrote a particularly vitriolic report:

> Written far too long after the event for anything but an overall impression. That impression is of gross self-indulgence on the part of the actors and the director. The play is not a good one, at least by Shakespeare's standards, but that surely does not excuse the very bad speaking of the text and the contortions of the verse that happened here. Neither does it account for the interpretation forced on it here in much the same way as the all-male cast forced themselves into PVC trousers with huge false codpieces for the male and painted nipples for the female characters. This might have been diverting if the bodies on display had been better or their ability to act commensurate. Not the case. Add to that no clear reason for treating the play in this way beyond a visual one and I think one might put it in a new category along Brookian lines marked jerk-off theatre. Should not be encouraged in front of a paying public – they might not go blind![53]

The report is striking for a number of reasons, not the least of which is Plowman's admission that he wrote it long after seeing the production. This admission indicates how cavalier he was about writing the report and Cherub's production: the report lists that he

saw the production at Edinburgh in August of 1979, but he couldn't be bothered to write down his response until March 26, 1980. Perhaps not coincidentally, correspondence between Lamede and Cherub about a pending application for subsidy was occurring at the same time Plowman wrote his report: the letters are dated March 25 and March 27, 1980. Plowman likely recognized that he needed to report on the production so that his views could be included in the discussion of Cherub's pending application.

From the report, Plowman makes it clear he doesn't approve of Cherub's publicity. They had advertised *Kinsmen* as "Shakespeare's last play," clearly an attempt by the company to draw an audience which would regularly attend Shakespearean productions. Plowman also quickly dispenses with the notion that Cherub is performing quality Shakespeare by rejecting the selection of *Two Noble Kinsmen* itself, notably basing his criticism of the play text on the "usual" quality of Shakespeare's writing. He then briefly dismisses the actors' verse-speaking abilities, before turning his attention to the "interpretation of the text." Even though this might be a bad play, he writes, that does not excuse the number of poor choices the company made in its production. In the report he makes no effort to engage with the production or to understand or rationalize the choices made by the company to support his criticisms.

The primary flaw Plowman cites is the half-clad, all-male cast who wore black leather trousers. Indeed, the latter half of the very short[***] report deals almost exclusively with the bodies of the male actors and, implicitly, on the activities of those bodies. While the drama officer regards the actors' bodies as poor, and his comment that they had to "force themselves" into the leather pants implies that the actors were out of shape or even fat, production photographs reveal fairly svelte actors, in no way heavier than the average

[***] The report is 172 words long, by far the shortest of the reports on Cherub in the ACGB archive.

adult male. They are not all Adonises with clearly defined musculature, but neither are they unattractive or unsightly. What Plowman *implicitly* says by dismissing the activities of those bodies is more interesting. While in his review, B.A. Young describes these couplings as "free from awkwardness," Plowman's discomfort with the largely obvious display of what he clearly saw as homosexuality is clear. He even calls the play "jerk-off theatre," indicating his preoccupation with the blatant sexuality in the production.

The leather attire perhaps also called to mind sexual kink. Dick Hebdige notes in his book *Subculture* that for punks "the perverse and the abnormal were valued intrinsically." In particular, he writes, leather and "the whole paraphernalia of bondage – the belts, straps and chains – were exhumed from the boudoir, closet and the pornographic film and placed on the street where they retained their forbidden connotations."[54] Topolski's sketches for the production's design concept clearly indicate how he thought the punk design should appear. "It must be wholly stylised," Topolski noted, and the sketches depict well-built actors standing rather majestically in their leather pants and headbands.[55] The goal seems to have been to make the connection with punk culture without also having to be faithful to it. How the audience subsequently read this stylized punk is impossible to say, but Hebdige's research offers the idea that "forbidden" sexuality was somewhat intrinsic to punk style and something that Cherub's production could not escape. Visnevski and Topolski were not intentionally queering Shakespeare, though inevitably the production was read this way by audiences, critics, and certainly by Plowman.

While the sexuality seems to dominate, the final line of the report provides an additional clue to Plowman's objection to the "interpretation" in the production: he

invokes the name of Peter Brook while castigating the production for its "visual" excesses. Brook's productions were always noted for their visual components, a mode the drama officer appears to reject. The positive critical responses to his *King Lear* (especially the scene where Gloucester is blinded) and his *Midsummer Night's Dream* were coupled with the revelation that Brook was willing to fiddle with the text of a play in unconventional (and perhaps unacceptable) ways. Brook's rejection of a strictly textual approach to theatre was what, in some circles, made Brook into a traitor to British drama. In his work with Cherub, Visnevski also treated text as something fully subject to the director's interpretation, and was therefore often accused of bastardizing Shakespeare. This "European" desire to work with classic texts but not to treat the text as sacred marks the real problem with Cherub's productions from Plowman's point of view.

As I previously noted, Cherub's choice to perform classic (if under-produced) texts also ran counter to the ACGB's established expectations for an alternative company. This was the true reason for the bluntness of Plowman's critique. The attempt of a young, upstart company at producing Shakespeare and other classic plays in a manner quite different from the standard interpretation—in other words, the "Brookian-ness" of the production—went too far for Plowman, warping Shakespeare in a manner beyond the drama officer's endurance, and presenting a threat to the status quo which needed to be swiftly dealt with before it widely circulated. The impact of this symbolic violence on an artist or company is significant. While minor deviance from standard practices can sometimes seen as "innovative" or even "avant-garde," more significant deviance often is simply labeled "bad". For Plowman, Cherub's *Kinsmen* was "Bad" Shakespeare, and in 1970s Britain, bungling Shakespeare was a capital offense. Cherub was seen as a

particularly egregious offender after *Two Noble Kinsmen*, thanks in no small part to Plowman, and its later productions of *Macbeth* and *Twelfth Night* would also be singled out by the ACGB's staff as violating Shakespeare.

It was not just Plowman and Lamede who criticized Cherub's *Kinsmen.* Another reviewer, Michael Quine, an agent of the Great London Arts Association—an RAA which received its funding from the ACGB—wrote in his report for the ACGB: "It was a matter of speed as well: I gather that they lopped about 10 minutes off the run the night I saw it… That may be well with Godot (didn't they get that up to a 25 minute variation?) but it's certainly not wise with a play like this."[56] "A play like this" is clearly a reference to Shakespeare, and Quine criticizes the production for the freedom the actors had to play—indicated by the variation in length—and he connects this with Samuel Beckett's absurdist *Waiting for Godot*, saying that Visnevski was "not wise" to allow this sort of freedom in Shakespeare. (Though why he felt that such variation was acceptable for *Godot* is unclear.) Earlier in the report, Quine wrote that the actors "didn't bring out fully either the events or the characters of the ironies" in the production. Visnevski's impulse, like Brook's and other "visual" directors, was always to examine the production for what it could do, not what had previously been done with it. The ACGB's reviewers seem to have had no truck with this strategy.

In his review of the production, Lamede actually managed to eke out some praise ("Andrew Visnevski, the director, clearly has intelligence, ingenuity and a good visual sense" – note the word *visual* again) before complaining that he "couldn't see the artistic impetus behind what the company was doing." Like Plowman, he criticizes the choice of the script (and the attribution to Shakespeare at all), and criticizes many of the actors

(one, he notes, "would not have been out of place properly cured and hanging in the local delicatessen") and said that

> everything was in quotation marks, on the surface and self-conscious. It cried out for some work from the gut, some grit and organic feeling; body, head and heart were not together. … [T]he bare torsos of the men, their leather trousers and exaggerated leather cod-pieces, together with the 'actorish' aura of the show, gave it a faintly distasteful camp feeling. It seemed neither honestly gay nor outrageously camp. [57]

The last statement stands out. Lamede clearly is attempting to put the production into a category, but he cannot call it "gay" and he cannot call it "camp." When he says that "everything was in quotation marks," I take that to mean that the performance was stylized, and when he wants "grit and organic feeling" I assume he wants it to be more realistic. Lamede was sensing but dismissing Visnevski's intention.

With all his work, Visnevski aimed for a deliberate estrangement from the everyday. Russian critic Viktor Borisovich Shklovsky, whose work influenced both Russian Formalism and Bertolt Brecht, wrote that "Art exists in order to recover a sensation of life, to feel things, […] to give the sensation of things as seen, not known; the device of art is to make things 'unfamiliar,' to increase the difficulty and length of their perception."[58] Brecht's experiments with the *Verfremdungseffekt*, one of his most complicated and widely misunderstood theories, sprang from Shklovsky's ideas. Visnevski had encountered the idea of estrangement in Poland while watching the work of another director:

> Konrad Swinarski [is] the most influential theatre director for me – his strange mix of baroque [and] Brechtian – baroque, because his theatre was incredibly rich and sensual and multi-layered, but at the same time you always felt that he was pushing you away from the emotional involvement in what you were seeing – he was inviting a sensual and intellectual involvement, rather than an emotional involvement.[59]

Visnevski talks still of the "small-scale, television realism" that he views as the dominant performance mode on the British stage. His work was (and is) always intended to be counter to that. He wanted to present work on stage that was unique to theatre; Visnevski believes that one can see realism on television, but only live performance can offer both physical sensation coupled with intellectual engagement. The speed of delivery, the terror of the fights, the passion of the kisses all were intended to separate the audience from the everyday, to allow them room for an intellectual engagement with what was happening on stage.

The men playing, but not disguised as, women were designed to provoke the audience to step back; as one critic noted, "costumes scarcely distinguished the sexes. Indeed it took a few minutes to ascertain which was which."[60] Literary scholar Tony Howard criticizes this choice, saying that the all-male company was a "disadvantage" because "the Amazons became fey and decorative presences while the Gaoler's Daughter was shrill and, in her madness, embarrassing. The emphatic sexuality seemed a sly anti-feminine joke." Howard indicates here that the choice seemed anti-feminist, and Lamede and Plowman assumed that the sexuality was meant to provoke a sensual (even masturbatory) response. While all three levy these opinions as criticism of the production, they all demonstrate the effectiveness of Visnevski's approach. If they were all uncomfortable while watching the show, either because they were made to think or because they became aroused, that was precisely Visnevski's aim. The discomfort, though, caused the ACGB's staff, especially Plowman, to sense a real danger in Cherub's work. So much so, in fact, that he attempted to undermine Cherub at every turn.

The lone positive review in the ACGB archive on *Kinsmen* was written by Jill

Davis, an academic and a member of the Drama Advisory Panel, and soon to become the chairman of the New Applications and Projects Committee. She would later edit an anthology called *Lesbian Plays*, with plays from some of the feminist alternative companies. Davis alone attempted to situate *Kinsmen* in its own context and to make an effort at understanding why the company had made the choices it did. "I've never seen a successful production of this play before," she began. "So the first success of this company's production, as far as I was concerned, was to make the play easy and interesting to follow. This was due primarily to the choices made in the design and direction and since Andrew Visnevski did both he seems to be an intelligent and imaginative man." Davis goes on to compliment certain moments which she found particularly effective: "The principle of direction appears to have been to find a signifying visual image for each individual scene and some of them are strikingly successful."[61]

Her major critiques largely revolved around the performances of the actors—"some of the performances are amateurish"—and around Lamede's question of what Davis calls "camp self-consciousness." She writes, "the leather, the phalluses, the chains and the 'transvestism' are not as neutral as they ought to be and the audience was quick to latch on to the camp aspects." Davis closes by saying both that "Visnevski is a talented man and that this company should be supported" and that because of the size of the company and what she saw as a largely successful production put together without subsidy, "this surely is the kind of organization and determination that we want to support."[62] So, perhaps even Davis didn't consider all of Cherub's production to be effective, but she still made the attempt to understand and rationalize the work, which

was more than any of the other ACGB reviewers had done.

On the paper document in the ACGB archive, Plowman has written a note at the bottom of Davis' review: "I thought the whole thing was an extremely misguided exercise in half-hearted camp. The acting was appauling [sic] and the direction egotistical and untalented. Much as I like Jill I hope this report does not mean that we support these children." This copy was circulated around the department and was initialed by all of the members who read it. I cannot, of course, determine the order of circulation, but undoubtedly Plowman did not write this comment to be read by himself alone. At least some of the other officers saw the note, casting the only positive report on the production into doubt. Plowman effectively vetoed the lone positive opinion of a member of the Drama Advisory Panel.

It was not unusual for ACGB staff to dismiss the opinions of those who were asked to advise them. In his book, *Giving it Away*, Charles Osborne, director of the ACGB's Literature Department for over 20 years, recounts the following story to demonstrate why the advisory panel's advice was not always taken:

> The grant applications have to be professionally assessed, and that is not a task one can entrust to someone who is not devoting his full time to it. … The trouble was that, usually, [the advisory panel] were so bad at [decision-making]. For a few years we did, in fact, allow two or three members of the Panels to join the professional staff in making decisions… What invariably happened … was that…if we were discussing an applicant organization, let us say a little magazine, the Panel members might well be unanimous in agreeing that the magazine was completely worthless and utterly unreadable, and its Editor virtually illiterate. 'Very well,' I would say. 'Thank you for your advice. So we don't offer any subsidy.' At that point, the Panel members' sentimental hearts would take over from their completely rational heads. The people who, minutes earlier, had been denouncing the magazine, now rushed to its defense.[63]

What Osborne and Sinclair both refer to as the "professional staff"—the drama director and the officers under him or her—often seem to have felt that they were on the front

lines in a battle where excellence had to be sought at any cost, and they firmly believed that their determination of excellence was the only one that mattered. It was necessary, in their minds, to deny subsidy on occasion because the ACGB could not be seen to be acknowledging mediocrity (and also because the money was not unlimited). As Osborne noted, "the good Lord, being no democrat, does not dole out talent in equal portions among the citizenry; those who approach the Arts Council for help are all too frequently the less favoured."[64] Though perhaps he is an extreme case, Osborne's high-flown attitude toward the ACGB's putative clients was not unusual.

Plowman firmly made his opinion known about Cherub. What is significant is the vitriol of Plowman's reviews, and it's worth taking a moment to consider why. His online bio[65] indicates that he began working for the BBC in 1980, which jibes with the fact that his initials no longer appear on the ACGB's circulation lists to the drama officers beginning that year. In Cherub's timeline, that means he was only around for their first two productions, though with his criticism he had made his presence felt. His first review on Cherub, for *Life is a Dream*, derides them for being like the 1960s East European movies, though he does indicate that "if they can, in the first place, stay together, and evolve a style which is more suited to their material, then I would have thought they should certainly be watched." The other review is the "written far too late after the event" review that absolutely castigates Cherub's production of *Two Noble Kinsmen*. He also left sporadic notes on various other reviews, including the already mentioned "I hope we don't have to give money to these children" review, and another note on one of Lamede's reports, criticizing him for complimenting Visnevski when "he [Visnevski] must be 'responsible' for everything else," namely everything that was

wrong with the production. In other words, Lamede shouldn't be doling out compliments when the majority of his report had been a criticism of the acting and hamminess that Visnevski, as director, was responsible for.

Why did Plowman loathe Cherub's productions so much? Until I can ask him, I won't know for sure, though I can make a few speculations. After Plowman left the ACGB for the BBC in 1980, he continued as a comedy producer and was eventually made Head of Comedy for the BBC in 1994. A short list of the shows he was responsible for producing or green-lighting includes *Absolutely Fabulous, French & Saunders, The Vicar of Dibley, The Thick Of It, The Office, The League of Gentlemen,* and *Little Britain*. In other words, he has been a significant part of British TV comedy for much of the 1980s and 1990s. In several interviews, Plowman has been asked how he decides which shows to air, and he has said that he chooses based on what strikes him funny:

> It's impossible to judge except that way. You can't say, 'I presume there are some people who would find this funny.' The most difficult thing is making sure you have enough people around you to represent all the different tastes. We have to make comedy for a lot of people.[66]

Plowman's sense of appropriateness quite obviously springs from what he appreciated; in the case of Cherub, he clearly appreciated very little. His own vanity – because he did not like Cherub – led him to believe that everyone should agree with him.

Most of the published interviews seem to quite admire Plowman's own gift for comedy, and a couple of otherwise drab YouTube videos feature him as a rather droll, bumbling middle-aged man attempting to test out green energy devices. Plowman himself has confessed that he's not always serious about his job. One interviewer notes: "When he worked in theatre, first at the Royal Court, later at the Lyric and for Wild Cat in Scotland, he admits that his colleagues at the time 'probably would have said that I

lacked a certain earnestness…'"[67] In another article, the writer is amusedly taken aback by his nonchalance about complaints against one of his shows: "perhaps [he's] not treating the matter with the respect befitting a senior BBC executive."[68] His acerbic ACGB reviews seem to go along with the idea that he's a prankster. One note that appears in his handwriting on an archived report on another company's production of *Alice in Wonderland* comments: "I'd like to see HG [the report's author] in a teapot."

My assessment is of a young man (Plowman would have been 26 in 1979) who had finished at Oxford only a few years before, had briefly worked at the Royal Court, and was quite taken with the power he had as a drama officer at the Arts Council. He was able to make certain that the types of performances he disliked were not funded, and he seems to have been capable of a remarkable amount of involvement when he disliked a particular company. It was Cherub's misfortune that Plowman took such an ardent position against it. Time and again in the correspondence from the ACGB, these reviews were trotted out to indicate why their applications were not successful.

Undaunted by the early rejection from the ACGB, Cherub pressed on. By 1980, Cherub had begun to establish itself as a company, and already it had acquired both the recognition of friendly newspaper critics and a powerful enemy in agents of the ACGB. Over the next three years, the company would produce another 15 shows, all with Visnevski's signature style. But Visnevski was not the only force in the company, and without a diverse group of actors and designers, the productions would not have been as varied and fascinating as they were to the audiences who attended them. *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, which would become one of Cherub's most celebrated productions and one that would win them a Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival, and the later production of

Macbeth were productions which featured many of the principle players and collaborators who would become the heart of the company. Without subsidy, though, the company had no choice but to produce as rapidly as it could, which made the next five years of its lifespan both hectic and rewarding.

Notes

[1] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, August 5, 2005.

[2] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, Dec. 12, 2010.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Visnevski, interview, August 5, 2005.

[5] B.A. Young, "Life is a Dream," review of *Life is a Dream* by Cherub Company, *Financial Times,* March 1, 1979.

[6] Jeremy Myerson, "Life is a Dream," review of *Life is a Dream* by Cherub Company, *The Stage,* December 1978.

[7] "Jonathan," Drama Officer's Report, June 25, 1979, ACGB Archive, V&A Theatre and Performance Archives, London, UK.

[8] "PJP," Drama Officer's Report, March 22, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[9] "Tales From Europe," http://thewhitehorses.angelfire.com/002-talesfromeurope1.html (accessed Sept. 15, 2011).

[10] Christopher Bowlby, *The Singing Ringing Tree*, radio programme, BBC Radio 4, original air date Dec. 28, 2002, http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4 (accessed September 15, 2011).

[11] Mark Hudson, "Return of the Teatime Terror," *Daily Telegraph*, March 30, 2002, 7.

[12] Theagg, "The Singing Ringing Tree Goldfish," *YouTube*, 04:20, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YAF3fWo8aoM; agentamour, "The Singing Ringing Tree," *YouTube*, 01:11:27, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxqz_BypPQI (both accessed November 29, 2011).

[13] Bowlby, *Singing Ringing Tree*.

[14] Rosemary Creeser, "Cocteau for Kids: Rediscovering *The Singing Ringing Tree*," in *Cinema and the Realms of Enchantment: Lectures, Seminars and Essays by Marina Warner and Others*, ed. Duncan Price (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1993), 120.

[15] Ibid, 121.

[16] Ibid, 120.

[17] Ibid, 121.

[18] Bowlby, *Singing Ringing Tree*.

[19] Ian Johns, "An East German fairytale continues to spook a generation," *Times*, Dec. 24, 2002, 15.

[20] Hudson, "Teatime Terror."

[21] Ibid.

[22] Bowlby, *Singing Ringing Tree*.

[23] "JAB," Drama Officer's Report, March 15, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[24] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 186.

[25] Ibid, 117.

[26] Stefan Toepler, "From Communism to Civil Society? The Arts and the Nonprofit Sector in Central and Eastern Europe," *Journal of Arts Management* 30, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 7.

[27] Zbigniew Osinski, *Grotowski and His Laboratory*, translated by Lillian Vallee and Robert Findlay (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 81.

[28] Naseem Khan, *The Arts Britain Ignores: The Arts of Ethnic Minorities in Britain* (London: Arts Council, 1976), 11.

[29] Jonathan Lamede, Letter to Andrew Visnevski, May 31, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[30] Lois Potter, Introduction to *The Arden Shakespeare: The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. Potter (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1997), 1.

[31] Ibid, 18.

[32] Ibid, 20.

[33] See Eugene M. Waith, Introduction to *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. Waith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); Hugh Richmond, "Performance as Criticism: *The Two Noble Kinsmen*," in *Shakespeare, Fletcher and The Two Noble Kinsmen*, ed. Charles H. Frey (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1989).

[34] Richmond, "Performance as Criticism," 168.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Martin Bailey, "A Punk Fight for the Bard," review of *Two Noble Kinsmen* by Cherub Company, *Evening Standard*, November 21, 1979.

[37] John Fletcher and William Shakespeare, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Lois Potter, ed (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd: 1997), Act I, Scene 1, lines 1-5, 19-24.

[38] Ibid, Act I, Scene 3, lines 81-82.

[39] Gerald M. Berkowitz, "Shakespeare in Edinburgh," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 31, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 166.

[40] Fletcher and Shakespeare, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Act II, Scene 2, lines 69-116.

[41] Ibid, Act III, Scene 6, lines 70-73.

[42] Ibid, Act IV, Scene 2, lines 52-54.

[43] Ibid, lines 155-6.

[44] Ibid, Act V, Scene 2, lines 107-111.

[45] Clare Jones, "Cherub Company are No Angels!" review of *Two Noble Kinsmen* by Cherub company, Review unsourced (from the production at Buxton Festival, Canterbury), c November 1979, ACGB Archive.

[46] Fletcher and Shakespeare, *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Act V, Scene 3, lines 138-44.

[47] Ibid, Act V, Scene 4, lines 49-50.

[48] Ibid, lines 52-4.

[49] Ibid, lines 96-8.

[50] Andrew Visnevski, letter to author, March 30, 2012.

[51] Bonnie Lee, "The Two Noble Kinsmen," review of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Cherub company, *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), September 3, 1979.

[52] B.A. Young, "The Two Noble Kinsmen," review of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by Cherub Company, *Financial Times*, November 26, 1979.

[53] "PJP," Drama Officer's Report, March 26, 1980, ACGB Archive.

[54] Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Methuen and Co, Ltd., 1979, Kindle edition, chap. 7.

[55] Felicks Topolski, Costume Sketches and Notes, Cherub Archive.

[56] Michael Quine, GLAA Drama Show Report, December 28, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[57] Jonathan Lamede, Drama Officer's Report, November 28, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[58] Lawrence Crawford, "Viktor Shklovskij: Difference in Defamiliarization," *Comparative Literature* 36, no. 3 (Summer 1984), 210.

[59] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, August 17, 2005.

[60] Jones, "No Angels!"

[61] Jill Davis, Drama Department Show Report, November 15, 1979, ACGB Archive.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Charles Osborne, *Giving it Away: The Memoirs of an Uncivil Servant* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1986), 168.

[64] Ibid, 169.

[65] Entertainment Master Class, "John Plowman, Exec. Producer, BBC Comedy, UK" http://www.entertainment-masterclass.tv/res/dnl/de/Plowman_CV.pdf (accessed May 28, 2011).

[66] Jean-Paul Flintoff, "Laugh, I Nearly Did," originally published in *FT Magazine,* September 11, 2004 http://www.flintoff.org/laugh-i-nearly-did (accessed May 29, 2011).

[67] Sabine Durrant, “Plowman's Half Hour: Jon Plowman is the Straight Man Behind the Funny Women Played by French and Saunders.” *Independent on Sunday,* March 2, 1994.

[68] David Rowan, “A BBC man who gets a lot of laughs.” originally published in *Evening Standard*, November 30, 2005, http://www.davidrowan.com/2005/11/interview-jon-plowman-bbc-head-of.html (accessed May 28, 2011).

CHAPTER III

1980-81: THE VORTEX OF STYLE

"[The total act] cannot exist if the actor is more concerned with charm, personal success, applause and salary than with creation as understood in its highest form. It cannot exist if the actor conditions it according to the size of his part, his place in the performance, the day or kind of audience."
– Jerzy Grotowski

When Ben Ormerod graduated from the stage management course at the Central School of Speech and Drama, he fully intended to become a director. With few director-training courses in the UK at the time, one path for would-be directors was to train as stage managers, begin working in the regional repertory theatres, and eventually segue into a role as an assistant director. Ormerod thought that he would seek work in the West End and spoke to a friend for advice. She said to him, "You should meet Andrew Visnevski, he's got this new company." Ormerod arranged a meeting with Visnevski, thinking his Central training would serve him well at the interview. "I remember asking him [Visnevski] if he was superstitious at the interview, because these were the kinds of stupid things we were taught at drama school. That, you know, some people don't like real flowers onstage, and all this kind of stuff. He must have thought I was mad," Ormerod recalled. Visnevski, though, didn't kick Ormerod to the curb. "He laid me down on a table and covered my face with plaster of Paris, with paper-mache [to make a mask]," Ormerod said. "Maybe that's how I got the job."[1] When Visnevski recounted the story for me, he proudly called it "a trial by fire."[2]

From August of 1979 to May of 1982, Cherub performed nearly 400 performances of 11 different productions at theatres all over Great Britain and Europe. The company was certainly in its most prolific period, if not its most successful, creating

two of their most notable and widely-toured productions during this span, *Kafka's THE TRIAL* (1980) and *Macbeth* (1981), and they received their first (and only) grant from the ACGB: £5,000 for the tour of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1981). Though the sheer amount of activity brought numerous new people into the company, a core group of actors, designers and technicians began to form. Visnevski was beginning to develop an *atelier,* a group of like-minded and specifically-trained people who were all producing theatre with the same attitude and in the same spirit as he was. "This is so unusual in England," Visnevski told me. "Like Tadeusz Kantor in Krakow, like Grotowski in Wroclaw, like Brook once he left England, what you want is your atelier, your studio space where you work with the people who want to work with you in furthering that particular profession and the skills that are required to practice that profession."[3] Unquestionably, Visnevski shaped these individuals, and they in turn shaped him, the company, and its productions. In this period of time, the Cherub Company became a true company, a unified artistic body in more than just name.

Complicating "Influence"

By definition, any atelier needs a "master-artist" it can cohere around. Visnevski, as founder and principal director of the company's productions, was that person for Cherub, though he was just 26 in 1979 and had directed only two productions. He proceeded to assemble around him a creative team that would help him set the course for the type of theatre that Cherub was to produce from 1980 onwards. This team included Visnevski's friend and mentor, Polish artist Feliks Topolski (figure 10), who had come to England himself years earlier, and described his protégé Visnevski in his

autobiographical work, *Fourteen Letters*:

> Andrzej [Andrew], a very young Pole, brought up in Poland, and a close friend for the past four years […], unaided yet stubborn. To give him more shape: his itinerant diplomatic parents supplied him with a world grasp – and grace of bearing – but he worked out his own transit from Poland to London's Central School of Drama, which made him bilingual and got him on to the Young Vic's stage – when he moved to form his company.[4]

Figure 10 – Topolski's sketch of Tom Hunsinger in *Kafka's THE TRIAL*.

Topolski had made a choice to settle in England, though unlike Visnevski, Topolski had not been exiled from Poland. He had been a reporter sent to the UK from Poland in 1935, and he fell in love with the country. He adopted it as his home a few years later and became a British citizen in 1947. "He has 'explored' many of the world's major events

and recorded them in oils, with pen, pastels and water colors," reported Yvonne Roberts in the *Telegraph Sunday Magazine* in August 1980, "and the Topolski style has always been unmistakable." Topolski himself was proud of his uniqueness. "I'm not a joiner, I'm an 'out-of-stepper,'" Topolski told Roberts. "I want to try everything, but I am also an old warrior. I battle through things and I don't get bogged down. Once I know I've tested an experience enough, I move on to the next thing. Let others settle for comfort, I am an explorer."[5]

Visnevski was also an explorer and an iconoclast, and his theatrical productions were largely arenas for him to experiment with his theatrical ideas. Visnevski had set out to create productions that were deliberately in opposition to those of the mainstream British theatre. This was not a perfectly honed mission, and initially, neither he nor those he worked with knew exactly how to effect that change. Their initial production wasn't radical and it wasn't political; *Life is a Dream* was simply a classic European play that Visnevski directed on a shoestring budget. *Two Noble Kinsmen* was more risqué, certainly, and while that might have been unusual for Shakespeare, it wasn't completely unheard of. With these early productions for Cherub, Visnevski was still searching for a way to marry his English training with his Eastern European background. The critics from the Arts Council had certainly recognized this, though not all of them were as vitriolic as John Plowman. Jonathan Lamede had begun writing his report by indicating that the "style [of production] needs a company capable of the most intense stylistic control…it would need something approaching the ability of Grotowski's Teatr Laboratorium."[6] This critique likely contains some truth; Visnevski, directing only his second production, had not yet learned to control his style.

With his next productions, Visnevski would utilize his new-found atelier to fully realize a lifelong need to create in three dimensions. "I was always very good with my hands," Visnevski said, "I was a sculptor, modeled a lot, modeled figures, faces, bringing, animating things out of lumps of clay, lumps of plasticine, animating worlds of my own." Living in London with his parents from the age of 10 in the mid-1960s, Visnevski was shaped by the opportunities of London's cultural scene. "I was still only 10 years old when I saw Maria Callas and Tito Gobi in *Tosca.* Something happened," Visnevski recalled. "The emotional freedom that Gobi and Callas found … within such a conventional form as opera must have been a revelation to me. Certainly it affected me in many ways, because I remember the very same evening I made a sculpture [of them]."[7]

Visnevski's artistic memory is quite acute, and the list of his theatrical experiences is a Who's Who of European culture of the 1960s and '70s. He was struck by the theatrical productions of Peter Brook in this period, as well as the "animalistic" acting of Laurence Olivier: "[it] brought out a sort of impetus to create in anybody who saw him, … because the vitality, the sheer animal vitality of his acting, demanded a response."[8] Polish theatre also impacted his aesthetic, and he saw productions directed by Polish directors Tadeusz Kantor, Konrad Swinarski and Jerzy Grotowski, and he witnessed some of the last performances of Ida Kaminska[*] in the lead role of Brecht's *Mother Courage* in Poland: "[it was] on this tiny, tiny stage at the Jewish State Theatre, which made me think of the simplicity of great theatre." He also saw Giorgio Strehler's production of the Goldoni [*Holiday*] *Trilogy* (1974) and productions by Patrice Chéreau

[*] Though she was world-famous, following an Oscar nomination for *The Shop on Main Street* (1965), the Jewish actress was a target of the rising anti-Semitism in Poland, just as Visnevski and his family were. She emigrated to the U.S. in 1968 and died in exile in 1980 at age 80.

and Roget Planchon in Paris, and the film and stage work of actors Jacek Woszczerowicz, Jacques Charon, Robert Hirsch, Jean-Louis Barrault, Maria Casares, Edvige Feuillere, Madeleine Renaud, Nuria Espert, Edith Evans, Vanessa Redgrave, and, almost above all, Paul Scofield. Visnevski turned to the unique qualities of the artists he admired when he began Cherub: "all these people offered something of themselves [that] I have sort of stolen for my own," he said.[9] Further enriched by the films of Federico Fellini and Ingmar Bergman, Visnevski's style had a raw passion and furious energy that fired the mind and the senses, but did not seek to promote emotional engagement.

One of the most striking things about Visnevski's list of influences is that he can recall so many of the performance events that shaped his own practice. Though many of them are fleeting, I find it essential to refer to his artistic experiences as influences. In not doing so, I would be at risk of attributing the strongest moments of Visnevski's artistic work to "inspiration," a vague notion which seeks to privilege the "lone genius," or those individuals who we might view as so talented that it seems like some god's hand has touched them. This notion, springing from Romanticism, actually masks the real work involved in artistic creation. I want to be clear that though Visnevski is likely the most important figure in the story of Cherub, and he is certainly the main driving force that keeps the company alive, even Visnevski himself would admit that he was not all that made up Cherub, and that their artistic successes were the result of experimentation, collaboration and hard work, as well as the legacies of the many artists who inspired or revolted them.

Just as scholars privilege solo-written works over collaborations, theatre historians also tend to over-attribute the resulting theatrical productions of those written

works to the artistic vision of the director. This tends to erase the collaboration and work of the artistic team that is actually responsible for the production. In Cherub's case, Visnevski is a central figure, but he was surrounded at all times by many people who brought their own experiences and ideas to bear on the company's productions. And, just as Visnevski has, they've had interactions and experiences with others before and after their time with Cherub. My contention is that all of these interactions, including the company's interaction with its audience, are all sites for the transference of knowledge. To go one step further, I will say they are influential.

A brief meditation on the difference between the terms "influence" and "inspiration" will help clarify this idea. The dictionary definition of the verb *to inspire* is "to encourage or stimulate," and its synonyms include the verbs to excite, to affect, to enliven, to infuse, to instill, to motivate and to trigger. Within the word is the Latin root *spirare*, for "to breathe." The word inspiration, then, signifies a breathing in, or an intake, of some external (but unseen) source. The word was originally connected with God or the Muses putting ideas into the heads of men: divine inspiration. Today, though, we conceptualize such epiphanies not as the work of the divine, but as the product of a singular, remarkable brain. By considering the epiphany to be the driving force of innovative action, we tend to forget the actual material and communal work involved. As Scott Berkun notes about Archimedes' famous "Eureka!" moment in his book *The Myths of Innovation*:

> The part of the story that's overlooked, like Newton's apple tale, is that Archimedes spent significant time trying and failing to find solutions to the problem before he took the bath…. So, as is common in myths of epiphany, we are told where he was when the last piece fell into place, but nothing about how the other pieces got there.[10]

What we call “inspiration” actually rises out of the (un)conscious effort of our having worked to put the pieces of our prior experiences and our prior thoughts together. Commonly, though, we choose to place more emphasis on the moment of epiphany, assuming that “true” inspiration yields a product which has an impact, one which has a clear and significant effect on the cultural field, in this instance. Privileging a fictional moment of epiphany results in reverence for “genius.”

Influence is in some ways synonymous with inspiration, but influence remains connected to sources of power in a way that inspiration no longer is. Its root, *fluere*, is also Latin, meaning “to flow.” The Merriam-Webster dictionary lists one archaic definition as “ethereal fluid held to flow from the stars and to affect the actions of humans.” Like inspiration, then, influence originally issued from the divine. Unlike inspiration, though, influence is now used as the marker for something which someone (usually someone with capital) gives to someone else. Someone saying, “I was inspired to write 10 pages today” is not the same as saying, “I was influenced to write 10 pages today.” The second sentence induces us to wonder *who* has influenced the speaker to write; influence requires a subject to cause it to occur in a way that inspiration no longer does.

Unlike *inspiration*, the word *influence* is itself useful for describing the work of artists because it doesn’t necessarily seek the erasure of the work involved in the production of an idea. An artist (maybe one who has been lauded for his “inspired” work) wields influence and offers it to others. In Bourdieu’s terminology, this is symbolic capital. When we examine influence, we often look for the supposedly “real” connections between people, including relationships like teaching, mentoring, and

collaborating as well as imitating—the places where the transference of symbolic capital is most obvious. We often do not go far enough at exploring what influence is nor do we dig deeply enough to examine how one thing influences another. What becomes critical, then, is to more diligently examine the sites where power and knowledge are transferred to develop a more accurate measure for whether or not a person or an event is influential.

Diana Taylor writes that an "act of transfer" often occurs due to "doubling, replication and proliferation," meaning that sometimes the meaning of an action can co-exist for two different groups, especially when two groups encounter one another and begin to adopt each other's practices. Her example is that of the significance of a person on bended knee; both the Spanish and the natives they conquered recognize this gesture of reverence, though the object of reverence (Catholic saint v. Mexican deity) was not the same. Taylor also notes, though, that Joseph Roach developed the term *surrogation,* or the "ways that transmission occurs through forgetting and erasure." Over time, we have come to associate the image of a person on bended knee as a largely Christian image, erasing any previous meaning. Further, the rationale for why surrogation occurs is more complex than simply just forgetting a reference. The saying, "the King is Dead, long live the King," as Taylor notes, emphasizes "uninterrupted stability over what might be read as rupture."[11] Taylor and Roach criticize historians who privilege continuity and completeness as this focus often erases or ignores the true history of human interactions. History, for many, is a quest for answers, and historians too often produce answers by ignoring what does not fit into their chosen narrative.

Taylor and Roach's criticisms are in line with those of Michel Foucault when he writes that history is more properly (or more effectively) studied genealogically. "An

examination of descent," Foucault notes, "also permits the discovery under the unique aspect of a trait or a concept, of the myriad events through which – thanks to which, against which – they were formed." He continues:

> Genealogy does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity that operates beyond the dispersion of forgotten things; its duty is not to demonstrate that the past actively exists in the present, that it continues secretly to animate the present, having imposed a predetermined form on all its vicissitudes. Genealogy does not resemble the evolution of a species and does not map the destiny of a people.[12]

For Foucault, history undertaken genealogically is primarily a destructive, rather than a healing, force. History is effective when the historian can question and undermine *a priori* knowledge, seeking instead to uncover and disrupt narratives that result in erasure for the sake of continuity. So it is with the crafting of the narrative of the so-called artistic genius and the influence he or she asserts on others. To assert that an artist's mindset is impacted only when symbolic capital is transferred from one artistic genius to another merely reinscribes the definitions of "importance" that have been developed by the cultural field. We need to accept instead that the viewing of any art work or the interaction of any two artists, both those which have been deemed important by the cultural field and those which have been ignored, is potentially significant.

Jerzy Grotowski and his Teatr Laboratorium in Poland and Andrew Visnevski and his Cherub Company in London have no direct connection, and certainly not one that would normally be considered influential. And yet, by examining their relationship genealogically, one can establish influence. By attempting to connect a famous director to one nearly unknown, one might argue that this is merely an attempt to legitimize one artist by using the symbolic capital of another, something which has been done many times before. However, I boldly state that the link between Grotowski and Visnevski is

unclear and minimal, and almost no symbolic capital was transferred. Yet, one can see Grotowski's influence in Visnevski's work, and even the ACGB's Lamede was sufficiently prompted by Cherub's production of *Life is a Dream* to remark upon Grotowski's company in his report. Something about the production suggested Grotowski to him, even if it was solely the shared nationality between the two Polish directors.

Certainly, the only corporal link between Grotowski and Visnevski is Visnevski's attendance at Grotowski's production of *Apocalypsis cum Figuris* in Wroclaw, Poland, in 1970. "I've still got my candle from that performance as my little fetish of an unforgettable experience," Visnevski told me.[13] Visnevski never studied with Grotowski, never attended any of his other productions nor took part in any of his later experiments. Nor, he claims, did he read any of Grotowski's writings, not even *Towards a Poor Theatre*. Grotowski, of course, is one of many, many influences on Visnevski's long list. He himself does not claim specifically the influence of Grotowski any more than the work of any other director whose work he saw. Yet, the link is there, both in the material sense (the "poor" characters in *Two Noble Kinsmen* who wore old flour sacks which are strikingly like those Grotowski's actors wore in *Akropolis*), and in the less tangible realm of performance, the actors' commitment, their emotion, their faces used as if they were masks.

In remembering his experience seeing *Apocalypsis cum Figuris*, Visnevski speaks of the "poor" quality of Grotowski's productions:

> with simple gowns or loincloths for his actors … into a philosophical and spiritual journey that very often lasts no more than 55 minutes or 50 minutes, and affected you to the depth of your nervous system. … Knowing that you were one of 30 who were allowed to come in for that particular occasion and there would be no

> more people allowed in. And that the actors would be there in front of you within touching distance, there was the whole aura of that … [and it was] lit by nothing else but one floor lamp and candles.[14]

I assert that the primary thing Visnevski inherited from Grotowski is the *virtue* of working with almost nothing. In Grotowski's "poor theatre" aesthetic, Visnevski discerned how compelling theatre could be, and this "poor" quality became a hallmark of Cherub's productions. Visnevski was not, however, attempting to imitate Grotowski's approach to "poor theatre." Grotowski's motivations to experiment with the limits of individual performance and his concentration on actor-centered theatre were not really ever part of Visnevski's plan for his company. And yet, in the Cherub actors' performances, Visnevski demanded a commitment that went beyond the standards of most other directors in Britain at the time. The physicality and pace he forced upon his actors emulates Grotowski's poor theatre.

Stylistically, Visnevski did not by his own choice simplify the spectacle of design in his productions. Indeed, Visnevski repeatedly talks of one of the aims of Cherub to be "baroque" like the "delighting-in-his-own artifice" Federico Fellini or being "rich and sensual and multi-layered" like Konrad Swinarski.[15] Visnevski admired decoration and artifice, and had Cherub been able to afford it, he would have used more of it. However Cherub could not, and Visnevski worked within his means. Ben Ormerod recalled:

> I never ever felt that the shows didn't look the way you wanted them to look because you couldn't afford it. And that was a very important lesson to learn. That you must never, ever say, "oh, well if I could have done this, I would have done that, but I couldn't, so I did this instead." You must never ever get into that mindset. …Andrew knew how to [maximize what he had]. And that's true with the actors as well. He would work with some actors who weren't the best actors in the world. He knew where the best performances lay in them, and he didn't want to pretend they were capable of things that they weren't. He was very good at that.[16]

While Cherub had no more money than any other alternative company working with no or very little subsidy in the 1970s and 80s, Visnevski found a way to make a *virtue* out of poverty. Alternative theatre in general had often been derided by critics for lacking style and for feeling amateurish in their design, and certainly Cherub was similarly targeted on occasion. However, like Grotowski, Visnevski always fought to make aesthetic choices within the company's limited budget, including working with artists like Topolski and others in order to have a unified stylistic vision for his company's productions. The scenery and costumes were often singled out in newspaper reviews of Cherub's productions: "playing on an economical set, with no décor but a tiny stage, a step ladder and some blue-and-gold bunting, [the company] make a very good thing of it," wrote B.A. Young of Cherub's *Life is a Dream*. Over and over again, Cherub's productions feature the hallmark quality of the virtue of having very little. When challenged by limitation, Visnevski decided to embrace the challenge rather than to just make do.

Poverty also led to another development, one that Visnevski and other Cherub company members described as having to rehearse and develop two simultaneous productions when mounting a single play: the production onstage and the one off-stage. Actor Paul Hegarty remembered that

> his plays require a lot of energy because you are entirely occupied. Not my previous experience. There are people called ASMs, DSMs, and occasionally a dresser if you're working in the West End or a big regional theatre. As opposed to [just] struggling to find [my] costume, I [also] set everybody else's out. Of course, that's part of his intention, that it is a total family.[17]

Cherub didn't have the resources to hire a full backstage crew, so Visnevski had his actors fulfilling all of the backstage roles: running props, shifting scenery (what little

there was), helping to dress other actors, making sound effects. While this is not markedly different than some of Brecht's experiments with his Berliner Ensemble, it was uncommon in British theatre. Most professional actors were accustomed to working in Rep houses where their offstage time was their own. What's more, Visnevski chose this course to solve a problem, not as a political maneuver. Eventually, Visnevski said he began to expect that level of commitment from his actors in every production: "it helped me form a skilled and harmonious working ensemble who helped each other and supported each other and could transform, keep transforming." He continues:

> I became aware after several years of how complex the choreography of backstage was in order to make the shows that I was creating possible. I took it for granted the first few years, and I became aware of it and I started being much more conscious while directing as a choreographer of backstage and front of stage/on stage. And now when I teach I actually teach two productions. To instill a discipline in actors of what happens backstage to make the particular magical event happen between actor and audience. And my productions are complicated. … It defies belief that I hadn't formulated it earlier. I was just doing it all in a creative whirl. A whirlwind of energy and inspiration, that's the right word.[18]

Within the whirlwind, Visnevski's choices were largely driven by the artists who influenced him; the work he had seen provided the puzzle pieces for him to assemble into a whole as he developed his own work. Grotowski's clear aesthetic and the understanding that theatre is not necessarily driven by its materiality, that it is driven instead by the power of the performance regardless of the money spent on realizing that performance, was a clear influence on Visnevski. The impact that Grotowski had had on Visnevski was significant, and he had only attended one production. Grotowski's was only one piece of the puzzle, but it was a critical piece. This somewhat minor idea became a key feature of Cherub's productions.

Into the Vortex

Visnevski speaks of this critical period of Cherub's history as a whirlwind, and certainly with so many shows in production and on tour, the company was in constant upheaval. Because Cherub was still having trouble getting the ACGB to fund any of their work, they couldn't afford to pay actors very much money. "He would give you what he could," actor Mary Keegan remembered. "I think there were one or two productions where he had actually gotten money for them, and we were paid a bit for that."[19] Her husband, actor David Acton, agreed: "You got paid for the British tours [on] an Equity contract, so you got 50 quid a week or whatever it was. But we never got paid in London."[20] To sustain the company, Visnevski was constantly preparing for the next production, and often while performances were happening of one show, the actors would be rehearsing another. This system allowed the company to have the income from the box office to be able to continue operating. Even so, no one was making very much money, not even the founder. "The first years were very difficult for me," Visnevski said. "I worked as an usher. I worked for other people while directing Cherub. Vi [Marriott] bought me supper once a week. We used to go to an Italian restaurant in Holborn, in Kingsway, called Verdi's and she'd buy me a plate of spaghetti and glass of wine and that helped. I was very poor."[21]

The acting company became especially peripatetic due to the low pay, as some actors left for paying work and new replacements were found. "It was a full-time company," Acton said. "So there was a continuous rolling of people coming in and rolling out. So you never felt, there was never a core group with some people coming to join just for that show; it never felt like that." Actors tended to stay in the company as

long as they could, enjoying the camaraderie and the uniqueness of the productions, though eventually even the most seasoned Cherub veterans found they had to move on. But it was not just the money, it was also the commitment required. Hegarty remembers that his time away from the company was motivated by the Visnevski's expectations as well as the low pay. "I couldn't sustain doing that," Hegarty said. "You'd have to have private income to do that. I'm married with kids. … I mean, doing a Cherub job is not conducive to family life, partly by its nature, but artistically, it's so absorbing. You kind of disappear into it."[22] Though he also noted that the challenge of that sort of commitment was a reason he returned to the company when he could afford to.

After *Two Noble Kinsmen,* Visnevski began to plan his next slate of shows. He was keen to do *Barabbas* by Belgian playwright Michel de Ghelderode for a tour of London churches at Easter, 1980. De Ghelderode's play examines the day when Herod and Pilate ask the citizens of Jerusalem to choose between saving either the criminal Barabbas or Jesus, who are both slated for execution. "I tried to turn it into a universal message about chaos of our existence, a need for some sort of guidance," Visnevski said. Barabbas, who the crowd saves, at first becomes wary of being used as a pawn and then remorseful when he acknowledges Jesus' self-sacrifice.

In this production Visnevski and the actors began to utilize makeup and masks more extensively as they created the various characters. "I had a white face for that, and outlined it in black," said Hegarty, who played Judas in the production. "I wore a black stocking on my head, and I wore a black shift. Not much left of your body to start displaying your character with, so that was quite a difficult journey." Like Polish director Tadeusz Kantor, like American director Robert Wilson, Visnevski's visual ideas

prompted a rather heavy-handed directorial style. Unlike either director, however, Visnevski's impulse was not to explore stillness in theatre, but to see what heightened energy and frantic pace would bring out in the actor's performances. "It's a complete melee, as far as I'm concerned," Hegarty said. "But, that's the challenge: to accommodate that. Because that's the vortex that you're in, of style."

With *Barabbas*, the vortex that Visnevski and the company created was rooted in de Ghelderode's text, Cherub's first production of a truly avant-garde play. Not much is known about de Ghelderode's private life; he talked largely about his work, feeling that "works of art must be deficient to the extent that they need biographical justification."[23] As a boy, he attended the marionette theatres in Brussels, and he transcribed many of the plays they performed. Many of his plays, including *Barabbas* (1928), were written for the Flemish Popular Theatre, a company begun in the 1920s with its roots in the European avant-garde. According to de Ghelderode, the theatre wanted a play for Holy Week, and he "saw the other side of the Passion, the Passion seen through the eyes of the people, seen from below….To embody the people, the mob, the violent emotive crowd in its state of trance, I chose the character no one ever speaks of [Barabbas]."[24]

Visnevski's production concept was that the characters from the play had emerged from the stained glass windows of the set or of the churches they were performing in, for sometimes they didn't need to use all of the scenery as they were performing in churches with stained glass windows. Eight actors took on the various roles in the play, and all but one were continuing their work with the company after appearing in *Two Noble Kinsmen*. *Kinsmen* was still in the repertoire, having recently played at the Young Vic (in December 1979), and plans were being made for the

company to tour the production to Stuttgart and to revive it at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 1980 (where it would play opposite *Kafka's THE TRIAL*). In front of the stained glass (the scenic one was made from melted lighting gel) was a long trestle platform, which I estimate from photographs to have been about three feet wide and 10 feet long. One of the most striking moments was played fully in the dark; when the disciples are confused about what to do after the arrest of Jesus, all the actors had been given flashlights to light themselves when they spoke. "It was completely black, so what you got was these faces appearing, and as they were dressed in black, it was really striking," lighting designer Ben Ormerod said. "So you had these faces, and then they would move around when they weren't speaking.… It was like there was hundreds of people rather than just six."

At the same time as *Barabbas,* and while Visnevski himself was honing his stage adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial*, the company reached out to hire a director other than Visnevski to create a production for the company. Only five people directed Cherub productions between 1978 and 2003: Visnevski, two company members and the two men hired to do so in 1980. This was largely done at the prompting of the ACGB, for in one meeting with Visnevski, a drama officer had suggested that the company hire other directors to do some of the company's productions. This would presumably provide Visnevski free time to tend to the management of the company, and Visnevski didn't completely mind the idea, as it would allow the company to produce more shows to tour. He first looked to Bernard Goss, one of the associate directors at the Young Vic, to develop a project for the company. Goss wrote, directed and composed the music for two children's plays: *Donkey Work* (1980), based on *The Golden Ass* by Apuleius, and

Monster Man (1980), based on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. The productions played in May at the Young Vic Studio, opposite *Barabbas*, which, fresh from its church tour, played on the Young Vic's mainstage. The company found Goss's productions sufficiently Cherubesque, particularly *Donkey Work*, which played to several schools on a very small tour and was revived the following year to play at the Buxton Festival and at Edinburgh.

Later in 1980, Visnevski hired Roger Michell to direct Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* for the company. The play was chosen as it was a set text that year in schools, so it was sure to get an audience of students who wished to see the play in performance. Michell's production featured many Cherub actors, including five continuing from the cast of *Barabbas* and four of the five actors from *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, fresh off their success at the 1980 Edinburgh Festival Fringe. While Visnevski had originally planned for the production of *Romeo and Juliet* to tour, ultimately he found the production disappointing. "Visually [with Cherub], I was striving for the extraordinary while in [Michell's] modern-day setting I found a drab reality; I wanted the actors to reach beyond the expected, while he wanted them to be 'everyday.' It was not where I wanted Cherub to go or how to make its mark."[25] The tour was significantly curtailed, and the production played only 11 times on tour and at the Young Vic opposite *THE TRIAL*.

Aside from some miscellaneous correspondence, two reviews, a few photos and a few copies of the program (many of which exist throughout the Cherub archive as scrap paper used for other purposes), very little exists to record what Visnevski saw as a disappointment.[†] No reports exist on the production in the Arts Council's files,

[†]Though Visnevski and Michell had a falling-out over *Romeo and Juliet* and Michell would never again work for Cherub, Michell went on to have a successful career as a director of theatre, winning his own

presumably because the ACGB was not invited to review the production. One of the two newspaper reviews reported that "the overall effect" of the production "is a bit like *West Side Story* without the music – on one or two occasions I half-expected Romeo (David Acton) to burst out into 'Maria' or 'Tonight'."[26] While the review was overall a positive one, Visnevski obviously did not see *West Side Story* as a model for the theatrical style he wanted Cherub to emulate. Though likely the ACGB had pressed the issue because they didn't like Visnevski's directing approach, actor Karen Mann told Visnevski at the time, "[Actors] come to work with you, what's the point of you engaging other directors?"[27] He saw her point, and save for two later children's productions, no one other than Visnevski directed a Cherub production until he left the company in 2003.

The disappointment of *Romeo and Juliet* was especially difficult, coming as it did on the heels of one of Cherub's greatest successes: an adaptation of Franz Kafka's novel *The Trial. Kafka's THE TRIAL* (1980)[‡] was a personal project for Visnevski, springing from a number of sources and inspirations. One of these was Fellini's films: "it is Fellini who has allowed me to indulge in returning to childhood: fantasies, mythologies, everything that affected me when I was a kid … without being ashamed of it, as he wasn't ashamed. Going back and sourcing his artistry from things that happened so long ago, and yet so deeply went into his bloodstream."[28] Kafka's novel is the story of a man, Joseph K, who stands inexplicably accused of an unnamed crime that he has no memory of committing. The procedural process he goes through (his literal and figurative trial)

Fringe First at the Edinburgh Festival in 1982 for *Private Dick* and subsequently working for the RSC. He has also directed films, including Julia Roberts in *Notting Hill* (1999) and Peter O'Toole in *Venus* (2006).

[‡] As the company referred to their production in all publicity and correspondence as *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, I will do the same, shortening it to *THE TRIAL* for simplicity. All references to *The Trial* (all lowercase) will be to Kafka's novel.

consumes his life. For Visnevski, *The Trial* was a fittingly haunting story for a man whose family fled an increasingly anti-Semitic, Communist Poland[§] to tell:

> I left Poland in '71 very badly scarred by the experience and with a tremendous contempt for Poland.…I retained an impression of the shabbiness of it all. And it was that shabbiness and the constant uncertainty that I wanted to recreate with *The Trial*. The feeling of perpetual insecurity, of being undermined, of walking around with a paranoia for being 'discovered' or being made to feel guilty for something you have not committed, which indeed had been my experience for three years in Poland while we were there. Going to school every day thinking, 'I'm going to be discovered.' Discovered at what? One didn't know but the paranoia had been created….[The police] always were one step ahead of you. They could always trick you, they could always undermine you, they could always frighten you, they could always beat you up, they could always prevent you from doing something that you had set your course on. And it was that insecurity that I think communicated to the audience.[29]

Visnevski had first come across *The Trial* through his love of artist and writer Bruno Schulz (who had first translated Kafka's original German into Polish and who had been murdered by the Nazis in 1942) and the actor Jacek Wozczerowicz,[30] who created a very famous theatrical version[**] in Poland with himself in the role of Joseph K. Visnevski created his own adaptation of the novel while the rest of the company toured *Barabbas*, working from Schulz's translation and Wozczerowicz's adaptation. Jeremy Myerson in *The Stage* lauded Visnevski's text as "the most promising aspect" of the production, writing that "Visnevski has not adapted any stock shock tactics to lift Kafka's flat, repetitious prose style for the theatergoer."[31] Playing to sold-out crowds in

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[§] Describing the Jews as "wreckers of peace" and constituents of "the forces of imperialism," Polish leader Władisław Gomułka began instituting widespread discriminatory programs, and began removing Jews from government and military positions to avoid the threat of their "negative" influence. This was largely done to curry favor with the Soviet Union, who had viewed the Six Day War in 1967 between Israel and its Arab neighbors as part of a Western Imperialist project, as Michael Checinski recounts. Emigration vastly reduced the number of Jews in Poland, and very few remained by the time the government's anti-Jewish crusade waned in 1971. (*Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York: Karz-Cohl Publishing, 1982).)

[**] Visnevski: "It is to him I owe the initial inspiration to do *Kafka's THE TRIAL* in 1980. He was dead by then, but his wife very kindly sent me his original adaptation from Poland to encourage me to forge my own. I credited her with that in the first Programme sheet for the production." (Email to author, August 20, 2005.)

Edinburgh, some of whom brought their own ladders to see over each other, *THE TRIAL* won a coveted Fringe First Award, and Francis King, critic for the *Sunday Telegraph*, named Visnevski best director in his Edinburgh wrap-up column.[32] The production then returned to London for a season at the Young Vic Studio where it garnered generally excellent reviews from the London critics.

With *THE TRIAL*, while Visnevski had experimented all along with pushing the boundaries of the scripts he was working on, for the first time he had full control over the script since he had written it himself. He was free to alter it as required, and to adapt and change things to suit the actors in the production. And the actors, all of them now on their third or fourth Cherub production, were also working in tandem with Visnevski in a way which fostered continuous experiment, if not always consistent agreement. "He wanted to have that rule, he's very autocratic, in that sense," Hegarty recalled, "I think that the struggle is to say, 'no.'… You don't have to do it like he says." Just as Visnevski was finding his voice, the actors were also. Hegarty said, "by then I was versed into the style with which to bring my own imagination to the part."[33]

THE TRIAL is the quintessential Cherub production, the one where Visnevski and his company of actors honed their theatrical ideas into a coherent language. Everything about the production, from the size of the cast and the simplicity of the costumes to the use of mask and confined stage space, was already or would become a marker of what made Cherub unique. The quintessence, though, was hard-won. "None of us knew how to play this script; how to make sense of it at all," David Acton recalled. "We tried great extremes of trying it that way and then something completely different, and then doing something completely different again. So it was a long time, and by the time we got to

open it, we had absolutely no idea whether this was going to work or not." In the true sense of experimentation, Visnevski and his company, through trial and error, worked to create the world Kafka had imagined. "[The actors] just responded phenomenally to the whole creation," Visnevski said, "to who they were and how they would enter that world of more overt physical expression of the characters and the wearing of masks where required, because not everybody wore masks all the time. I remember that there was a selection made of who should wear masks and who should not." By now on his fourth Cherub show, Hegarty found a liberation in the work: "I remember doing *THE TRIAL* the first time round at Edinburgh, it allowed you to free up your imagination. Things don't have to be just because they're in the script."[34]

As he and the actors became more comfortable working together, Visnevski often faced resistance to some of his directorial ideas. "I think if he had a fault at the time it would be because he would inject too much, force actors with too much pace before they were ready for it," Acton said. "[I have] a recollection of having to fight against him doing that; just to allow yourself to have a bit more time to absorb the character to know what you are doing before you start revving it up." Hegarty agreed:

> He likes his speed runs, and he wants you to pick up cues. Once he's got his script, he likes it to be rattled through, I think. You think, hang on, I don't want to rush through this bit; sometimes you have to be as strong as he is. He's a strong character. That suits me, that's not a criticism, that's fine. [But] otherwise he'll just completely decorate his cake and stick you on it, the groom, you know.

In my interview with him, Hegarty brought up Visnevski's later use of puppets – "over which he has total control, visually and intellectually" – when he talked of Visnevski directing. Many of the Cherub stalwarts, especially those who worked on several different Cherub productions, talk about the need to fight for their own individuality, to

be neither the puppet nor the groom on the cake. What the company was working toward was what would later be called (by others) "physical" theatre, performances which, according to Simon Shepherd, "set a frame of expectations around the importance and productivity of the performing body," as opposed to naturalism, which "foregrounds the relations between people and their environment through a staging in which rooms and bodies seem to interpenetrate."[35]

Visnevski, Hegarty and the rest of the actors in the company were all actively debating the best way to produce *THE TRIAL*, and given that it remains one of Cherub's biggest successes, this period of rehearsal has to be seen as one of the most creative in Cherub's 25-year history. Clearly, the disparate voices in the room worked to make the production better, and the need to push back against each other developed and strengthened individual ideas. In his article "Groupthink: The Myth of Brainstorming," Jonah Lehrer writes of several studies by University of California at Berkeley professor Charlan Nemeth which explored the creative process done by groups. Nemeth determined that disagreement makes groups far more creative than universal agreement. Writes Lehrer:

> Even when alternative views are clearly wrong, being exposed to them still expands our creative potential. In a way, the power of dissent is the power of surprise. After hearing someone shout out an errant answer, we work to understand it, which causes us to reassess our initial assumptions and try out new perspectives.[36]

The creation of theatre is not a solitary adventure, and a sole focus on Visnevski as the creator of *THE TRIAL* would be misleading. He wrote it, directed it, shaped it, but it was a full-company success story.

Kafka's THE TRIAL

Throughout Visnevski's script, we are allowed to see how Joseph K's trial has disrupted his life. The first three scenes of the play show us a typical morning, with each scene a subsequent day:

> (*Mrs. Grubach's boarding-house. Joseph K's room. In black out the servants' bell is heard. Lights [up]. Joseph K is standing in front of a mirror. He adjusts his tie. A knock on the door.*)
> **Joseph K:** Yes. Come in.
> (*Enter **Anna**, smiling.*)
> **Joseph K** (*as he buttons his waistcoat*): Good morning, Anna. It is already five to eight. I don't want to be late for work. What's the date today? Oh, yes… yes…the fourteenth. […"the fifteenth." … "the sixteenth."] (*He turns to her.*) Anna, you may bring my breakfast.
> (***Anna** gives a quick curtsy, smiles and exits, shutting the door.*)[37]

The fourth scene began just as the first three had, except this time, Anna (played by Isabella Knight) did not enter. This time, it was the guard called Frank (David Acton) who entered, while the other guard Billy[††] (Paul Hegarty) remained in the hallway. This repetition of Joseph K's life is not in the novel; it is Visnevski's dramatization of Kafka's opening image where Joseph K waits for his breakfast: "His landlady's cook, who always brought him his breakfast at eight o'clock, failed to appear on this occasion. That had never happened before."[38] Frank's entrance in the fourth scene breaks the pattern, and in performance, the audience watched as Joseph K (Tom Hunsinger) jumped across the stage, startled. Where Kafka's guards were somewhat dour when they come to arrest Joseph K, Cherub's production trapped him in an absurd farce: Billy and Frank were clowns (though not costumed as such) from whom Joseph K could not get a straight answer (figure 11). Indeed, if these were the representatives of the law against whom Joseph K had trespassed, the world was very troubled indeed. They laughed at Joseph K

[††] In Kafka's novel, the guards are known as Willem and Franz.

as they bumbled around and fed each other his breakfast, all the while pestering him and ignoring Joseph K's pleas for justification for his "arrest."

> (***Joseph K*** *tries to sit on the chair, but* ***Billy*** *gets in his way and sits on it.* ***Joseph K*** *turns to move to the bed, but* ***Frank*** *runs to the bed ahead of him and sits on it, giggling.*)
> **Joseph K:** We live in a democracy…in times of peace…law and order. And I, an innocent man, am threatened and intimidated. That's right, gentlemen, intimidated.
> (***Billy*** *rises and gives* ***Joseph K*** *a friendly pat on the shoulder.*)
> **Billy:** He seems a reasonable fellow.
> (***Frank*** *rises and picks up* ***Joseph K's*** *nightshirt from the bed*)
> **Frank:** He probably is reasonable.[39]

Figure 11 – Frank (David Acton), left, and Billy (Paul Hegarty) confront Joseph K at the start of *Kafka's THE TRIAL*. (photo: Chris Pearce)

As Joseph K pleaded for sense, Billy and Frank continued to insist that no error has been made. When Joseph K demanded to see their superior, and Billy replied, "When he asks to see you, not before." Shortly after this exchange, the Inspector was heard shouting

from the next room, and Billy and Frank prepared Joseph K by making him change out of his grey suit and into a proper black one. Frank laughed as Joseph K pulled down his pants, and Billy ordered Frank to leave and to tell the Inspector that Joseph K will be there shortly. When Joseph K was dressed, they both exited through the door.

The scenery in the production, designed by Tom Hunsinger, was simple but evocative. There were no walls, only two white, off-center rectangles taped on the floor designating the acting area. "Andrew marked out a square and then realized it was slightly off center," Acton remembered. "So he did another square. There were two squares on the ground overlapping each other, slightly off center from each other. And he liked it, so he kept it. It just stayed."[40] The accident of the floor coincided with the overall spare staging Visnevski had been planning. Kafka's novel takes place in a series of rooms, and in Cherub's production, all of the rooms were played in the same space. As soon as the actors exited the door in one room, the lights would go down and would quickly come back up on them re-entering "another" room. Hanging upstage of the action, suspended on invisible wires, were white plaster masks which spun and swirled in space, as if there was always someone present, someone watching. The face upon which the hanging masks were molded was Visnevski's (figure 12).

The door through which the actors came and went was a four-foot high door that had been a backstage door-slam sound effect from the Young Vic. "In Eisenstein's masterpiece, *Ivan the Terrible*," Visnevski wrote me, "everyone enters through little doors and looks immense as they straighten up. For the *Kafka's THE TRIAL* the association became the opposite: entering into another torture chamber, or place of

humiliation, so it takes an act of faith to stoop and enter. ⌗⌗ As Joseph K stands before the door, he is invited to face a new unknown."[41] Inside each room were three black boxes of varying size, with grey painted outlines of a table, chair and bed on them. These were moved around and utilized in various ways for each scene, and were the sole furniture used in the show, as the scenic budget was only £100. The costumes were very simple, and the coats of the men were smeared with paint, to be a "reflection of the shabbiness of the clothing in [Communist-era] Poland," Visnevski said.[42] All of the actors painted their faces, and some wore masks. Frank and Billy had painted faces and white nylon stockings pulled over their heads, so they were additionally distorted.

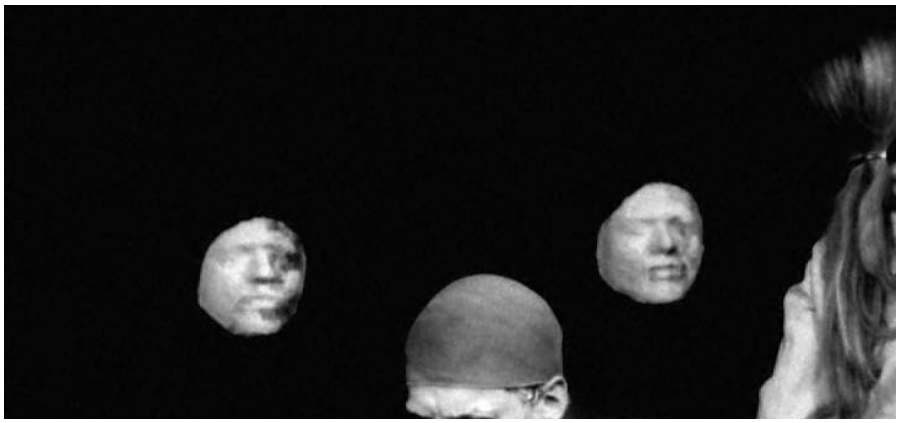

Figure 12 – The hanging masks at the back of *THE TRIAL*'s set. (photo: Chris Pearce)

The Inspector (Anthony Wise) in the next scene, which took place in Joseph K's neighbor Miss Burstner's room, wore a half-mask, white with black outlining. All the masks were painted to match the made-up faces of the actors, and he had a bowler hat which had been covered in grayish paint. He told Joseph K that he need not be concerned

⌗⌗ Visnevski: "This was compounded by a story told on TV by the late great Sir Michael Redgrave, invited by Sir Laurence Olivier to play Claudius in the 1963 *Hamlet.* The doors in that production were apparently quite low and as Claudius entered, he had to stoop. Redgrave complained that Olivier shouted, 'More dignity, Michael, more dignity!' but that once you stoop so low, you cannot regain dignity (he'd obviously never seen *Ivan the Terrible*)."

about the proceedings against him and that he should continue on as if nothing had changed. Joseph K, incredulous, went off to work at the bank. As he exited, the stage was blackened and the audience heard the sounds of a bank, as created by the members of the company: typewriters, voices, phones, adding machines. Joseph K stood in a spotlight, still smarting over the morning's events and thinking that the clerks at the bank were mocking him as the ensemble made noises all around him. He mistakenly thought that the happy words that met him upon his arrival, "Sir, on this special day, please accept from all of us here…" were the continuation of a practical joke, and he interrupted them, proclaiming the joke to be "in very bad taste."[43] They, however, knew nothing of his arrest, and simply offered him a bunch of flowers in honor of his birthday.

The next scene featured, for the first time in the play, Joseph K speaking a soliloquy to the audience and rationalizing his situation (figure 13). He said that he would go to see Miss Burstner to apologize for the intrusion into her room, which he did in the next scene. When he entered her room, she was in her nightgown. Knight, a Polish actress, played Miss Burstner and all of the other women in the play, bringing what Visnevski called "a combination of lyricism and utter sluttishness, which was exactly what one needed in this black and white picture that I was creating."[44] The scene was the first of many love scenes between Joseph K and the various female characters, and prior to his exit at the end of the scene, Miss Burstner pulled open her gown and Hunsinger's Joseph K "kissed her breast, her neck, her lips."[45] This fulfilled Kafka's image of Joseph K leaving Miss Burstner's room in the novel: "[Joseph K] rushed out, seized her, and kissed her first on the lips, then all over the face, like some thirsty animal lapping greedily at a spring of long-sought fresh water."[46] In both the play and the novel,

she promptly pushes him off of her, rejecting him.

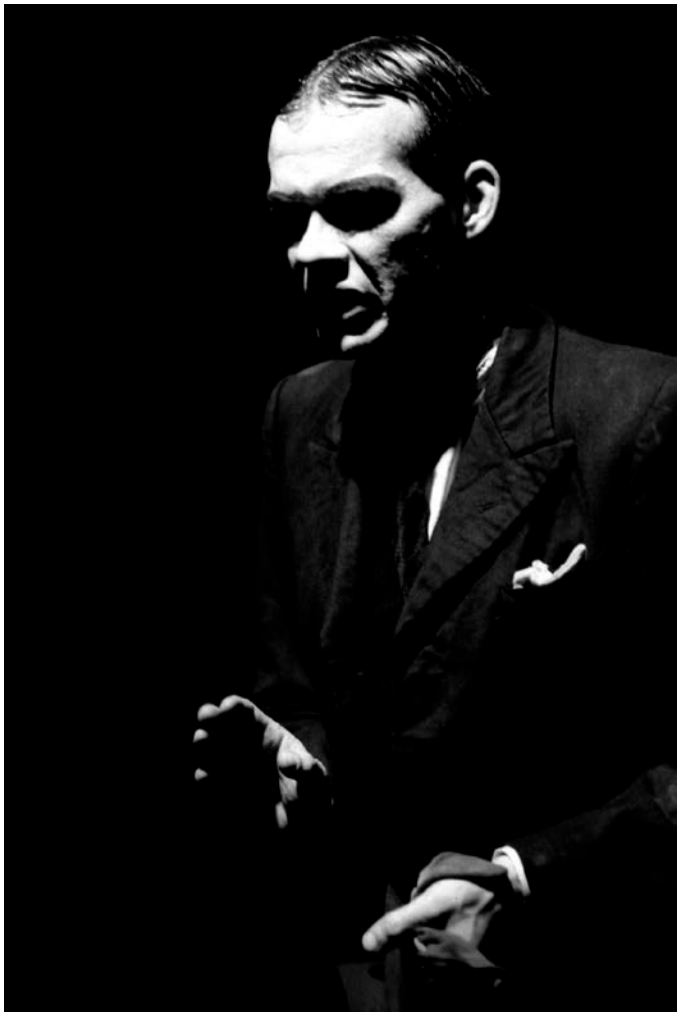

Figure 13 – Joseph K (Tom Hunsinger) speaks a soliloquy.
(photo: Chris Pearce)

After a brief scene where Joseph K received orders to appear for an interrogation on the following Sunday, and another soliloquy, Visnevski wrote another sequence of four scenes, the initial three playing exactly the same, and with a variation in the fourth.

> (***Joseph K*** *climbs [stairs] to the first floor. Knocks on door. A* ***Woman*** *answers the door.* ***Joseph K*** *bows, raising his hat.*)
> **Joseph K:** Carpenter Lanz, please.
> (*The* ***Woman*** *gives him a quick, surprised look and turns to someone inside the flat.*)
> **Woman**: The gentleman's asking for carpenter Lanz.
> **Voice**: Carpenter Lanz?

(***Joseph K*** *attempts to look into the flat over the* ***Woman's*** *shoulder.*)
Joseph K: Yes, does Lanz, the carpenter, life here?
Voice: Carpenter Lanz does not live here.
Woman: Carpenter Lanz does not live here.
(*The* ***Woman*** *closes the door as* ***Joseph K*** *bows. Blackout.*)[47]

In the fourth scene, Joseph K was unexpectedly greeted by the woman (now the Bailiff's Wife) who then invited him into the flat. In the novel, the interrogation takes place in a tenement apartment building, and Joseph K has been given neither the exact address nor the time at which he is to appear. He goes from apartment to apartment, asking for Lanz as an excuse to see inside each apartment. As in the novel, Visnevski's production had Joseph K repeatedly climbing stairs, though onstage the stairs were imaginary. By the finale of the four-scene sequence, Hunsinger's Joseph K was panting and exhausted for his court appearance. When he met the Examining Magistrate (Hegarty), the Magistrate berated Joseph K for being late. The Magistrate wore a white mask with only a black circle around one eye. Hegarty:

> I remember we had talked about the judge as if he'd have a monocle, looking through this little spec. That's where we got the circle for the eye [on the mask]. I was just looking, and that's taking the idea of the character's intention and visualizing it, and it may be not obvious to the audience, but all of these things are layers aren't they? Of that notion that you might be looking with one eye through a keyhole but also looking disparagingly and patronizingly at the defendant. [48]

Once again, the ensemble actors created the sound effects in the scene, this time of a large crowd of people watching Joseph K's interrogation. The script calls for Joseph K to give a long speech, protesting his mistreatment and decrying the proceedings. In performance, this was punctuated throughout by noises from the "crowd," orchestrated from above by the Magistrate, though Joseph K believed their responses to be sympathetic to his plight. Joseph K subsequently discovered that the supposedly important papers the Magistrate was thumbing through were nothing but pornographic

magazines. Ultimately, he had had enough, and he stormed out as the Magistrate said to him, "I would just like to point out that you are depriving yourself of the advantage conferred on the accused by the interrogation."[49]

In the next soliloquy scene, Joseph K expressed his nervousness and counted the days since his arrest, and he resolved to return to the Court for his interrogation, which he does. He encountered the Bailiff's Wife, who was doing laundry. She described how ill-treated she and her husband were at the hands of the Examining Magistrate and his Student (Acton), who promptly came in and she allowed him to carry her off, thus rejecting Joseph K's offer to help her. The Bailiff (Wise) entered, and they discussed his wife and Joseph K's trial. The Bailiff showed Joseph K into a waiting room in the attic, though the heat made Joseph K ill and he left. In the next scene at the Bank, Joseph K encountered Billy and Frank again, though this time they were being flogged because Joseph K had supposedly denounced them. Joseph K tried to bribe the Flogger (Wise), but he refused, and after a soliloquy, the audience heard the two guards being flogged in the darkness.

Through the next 15 scenes in the script, Joseph K attempted to hire a lawyer, Huld, and while at Huld's house, he met another girl, Leni the nurse, with whom he had a dalliance. Huld was very ill and in a wheelchair and was ultimately not that helpful with Joseph K's case. In a later scene at Huld's house, Joseph K encountered Block (Hegarty), a merchant who has been on trial for five years. Block carried a stack of papers with him, which in production unfolded to make a blanket for him to sleep and wait for Huld to help him (figure 14). The script calls for Block, "like a frightened dog, [to] crawl up to Dr. Huld and lick his hand."[50] Joseph K is horrified, likely seeing his

own future in Block, and he hurries off. Block had told Joseph K of a painter, Titorelli, who he had visited and might be able to assist with Joseph K's trial. Joseph K went off to see Titorelli, and the audience saw a sequence of scenes with Joseph K climbing stairs and encountering a hunchback girl as he searches for Titorelli. Once again, the repetition of the search disorients him, "so the coming face-to-face with Titorelli is another jolt," Visnevski said.[51] Like all the others, Titorelli made promises to assist Joseph K, but they came to naught. In the next sequence of scenes, Joseph K attempted to write his own petition to the court, but ultimately cannot do so. He also encountered a priest at the cathedral, who said to him that his trial is going badly and that he will most assuredly be found guilty because he has sought too much help from others, especially women. Joseph K returned home, absolutely distraught.

Figure 14 – Block (Paul Hegarty) bundles up under his blanket of legal documents. (photo: Chris Pearce)

In the final set of scenes, Visnevski once more has a now-very drained Joseph K

repeating a consistent sequence:

> (*Mrs. Grubach's boarding house. Lights up.* ***Joseph K*** *is seated weakly on the chair. He seems to be expecting a visit. A knock on the door.* ***Joseph K*** *rises without looking at the door, picks up the black gloves lying on the table and begins to put them on*.)
> **Joseph K:** Come in. (***Anna*** *bursts in. She is impatient and impertinent.*) Oh, it's you Anna. Good evening. It's one minute to nine. What's the date today? Oh, yes, yes… the day after tomorrow will be one year since the trial began. Could you bring my dinner, please.
> (***Anna*** *makes a rude gesture and noise and exits fast, slamming the door. Blackout.*)

In these scenes, Joseph K appeared to know that his days were numbered. The two visitors who arrive in the third scene of the sequence (one year exactly from the start of Joseph K's trial) were dressed as skeletons, meant to evoke undertakers. They were played by Acton and Hegarty, the same two actors who had played Billy and Frank, though this time they wore skeleton masks under the white stockings on their faces, and where Billy and Frank wore newsboy's caps, the skeletons wore top hats. They seized him, and in the final scenes of the play, they led and almost carried him through town where they encountered Miss Burstner soliciting a "client." According to Visnevski, "Joseph K [then] initiates a run towards his end: the three of them ran on the spot faster and faster… This lasted over a minute; the two 'skeletons' could not keep up as Joseph K ran ahead of them." Exhausted, they arrived at a deserted spot. The script calls for the men to remove his clothes, though in production only his hat, gloves, coat and waistcoat were removed (figure 15). They laid him down upon the ground, where Joseph K made a last plea for mercy, exclaiming that he has been "overlooked" and been treated unfairly.

> **First Skeleton** (*his hands at* ***Joseph K****'s throat*): Joseph K, are you ready?
> **Second Skeleton:** Joseph K, are you ready? (*He pushes the knife into* ***Joseph K****'s heart.*)
> **Joseph K:** Please gentlemen, aim straight for the heart. (***Second Skeleton*** *twists the knife twice.* ***Joseph K*** *sits up.*) Like a miserable dog! (*Blackout*.)[52]

"People talked of the terror being palpable in the production," Visnevski said,[53] and as if to prove his point, *Time Out*'s reviewer wrote: "I shall long remember the sheer brutality of a scene in which two bizarre government lackeys are stripped and beaten, and the final, pitiful demise of Joseph K himself."[54]

Figure 15 – The skeletons prepare to execute Joseph K. (photo: Chris Pearce)

Critics and audiences found Visnevski's production overwhelming and visually astonishing. "Many details reveal Visnevski's talent," wrote John Elsom in *The Listener*, "such as the small door through which the actors must crouch their way, the slobbering, red-gashed mouth of the prison chaplain, the use of masks and stocking heads, the deliberately faded porn books read in the law courts, and the grotesque mime."[55] The expressionist style of the piece put Joseph K in the centre of a world empty of trappings but full of malice, suspicion and fear. The five actors played all 20 characters, with

masks and white face makeup distorting their features, akin to the paintings of expressionist George Grosz. Two long-time Cherub audience members, Doreen and Silvia Saddleton, recalled their mother's comment after seeing only five actors at the curtain call: "Where are all the rest of them?" she had asked.[56] Visnevski is quick to point out that a lot of the power and impact of the production came from the central performance:

> I was very lucky with Tom Hunsinger's performance [as Joseph K]. Tom somehow embodied this man who thought of himself as a perfectly normal, decent type of man who in fact turned out to be quite seedy himself. But the quality that came across most of all was his incredible sensitivity of 'Everyman.' It almost felt as if he was naked onstage all the time.…There was an intimation of threat, [and] he almost shook or collapsed or shuddered in some way and winced. And the audience winced with him, he was able to share it with the audience… He had a clown-like quality, you laughed and you cried with him. Despite not being Jewish, but being an American boy from Kansas. Neither Jewish nor Continental, but he acquired this Continental quality.[57]

The production's physicality was stylised and almost commedia-esque, putting Joseph K further into a horrific milieu of startling characters whose movements were as slimy as their clothing. The female characters in particular were highly salacious, initially leading Joseph K toward hope of a real physical connection with another person, only to discard him as so much rubbish. The skull-masked men who come to take Joseph K away and execute him at the end of the play do their duty in a jerky, jelly-like dance that brings one's thoughts to cartoon skeletons.

Kafka's THE TRIAL would stay in Cherub's repertoire for several years, touring nationally and internationally. In 1986, composer Stephen Edwards asked for Visnevski's assistance in creating a chamber opera version of the production. The original scenery was re-imagined by designer Barbara Hook, and Philip Bretherton, who had taken an ensemble part on one of the continental tours of *THE TRIAL*, took the role

of Joseph K. In 2001, Visnevski decided to revive his production for a season called *Degenerate!* at the Riverside Studios. Paired with the short children's opera *Brundibár* by Hans Krása, the season was dedicated to the victims of the Holocaust, "degenerate" being a reference to the Nazis' *entartete Kunst* (degenerate art) exhibit in Munich in 1937 where modern art featured as the antithesis of the high standards of the Aryan race, and the term soon applied to "works by Jewish artists, writers and composers."[58] Visnevski's sense was that the world that Kafka referred to in *The Trial,* as well as the world around the 1980 production, still existed in 2001, it had just "mutated." Visnevski, in a program note, wrote: "the sacred shrine of physical and spiritual privacy *is* a thing of the past…. [The] situations are still apt, expressed in the new production more farcically and senselessly – as so much around us – and moving at life's dizzying tempo. We are performing in a cruel circus."[59]

To crystallize this idea, the new production's design was a house-like structure that could be opened, moved and re-arranged. For *Brundibár*, the action was played outside of the house, with the actors playing adults on stilts coming out of the door and becoming menacingly tall as they straighten up – similar but with the opposite goal to the movement through the little door in the original production of *THE TRIAL* – physically differentiating them from the actors playing children. For *THE TRIAL,* the house splits in two, exposing the inner life of Joseph K and his experience to the audience. The production's new tone fitted perfectly with the simple and rather upbeat *Brundibár* (albeit that the latter's most notable performances were at the Nazi "model camp" of Theresienstadt from where Krása and the original performers were later sent to concentration camps and murdered). "Cherub has remembered that Franz Kafka's

masterpiece of paranoia and horror is often actually highly comical," wrote critic Siobhan Murphy in *Metro*.[60] Jason Southgate's set and costume design became more starkly black and white than in the original, with the policemen who kill Joseph K at the end becoming full skeletons, complete with bones painted on to their suits, rather than just masked as they were in the original production.

Missteps

Despite the success of *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, the company's future was not assured. It still struggled to make ends meet, and no offer of subsidy from the ACGB was forthcoming. The reports from Jon Plowman and others were still in their file, and although Cherub's work had unquestionably improved over time (as the ACGB wished to see companies do before they were funded), the negative reports about them kept them impoverished. But the nature of the ACGB and its funding process cannot be summed up with one negative review, or even three. Further, painting Cherub as a helpless pawn in the process would be to both take away the company's agency and to ignore the facts. Cherub itself was complicit in its own failure to receive subsidy.

Cherub's first misstep came when Visnevski attempted to obtain program subsidy rather than project subsidy on a couple of occasions. As I recounted in the previous chapter, the ACGB preferred to test the waters when working with a new company by offering grants for specific projects. After a number of project grants, a company could be considered for program, or annual, subsidy, a more sizable grant intended to support the work of a company over the course of a year. In part, the misunderstanding between Cherub and the ACGB seems to have come out of the rather chaotic nature of Cherub's

production schedule in this period. Without subsidy, the company had to continue to produce and perform if it was to stay alive. Having become a cooperative in 1979 before *Two Noble Kinsmen*, the actors and crew were only being paid from box office receipts, after expenses were deducted. In its first five years of operation as a cooperative (1979-1984), Cherub put up 17 new productions. This number includes the four new productions in 1980 and the five new productions in 1981. In those five years, the company produced half of the total number of shows that Cherub would produce over its 25-year lifespan.

Cherub's hectic schedule of performances and rehearsals and organizing tours didn't jibe with the Arts Council's timeline. "You will of course be entitled to submit project applications in 1980/81, once the Council makes funds available," Lamede wrote to Visnevski in August of 1979 after noting that the company's application for program subsidy had been denied. "I would suggest you contact me no later than January 1980 if you intend to put in an application for the period starting April 1980."[61] At the time, Visnevski was preparing to leave for Edinburgh for the premiere of *Two Noble Kinsmen* at the Festival Fringe, a production produced and subsequently toured without subsidy. He was also planning the company's next productions. In February of 1980, Visnevski sent a letter to the Drama Director, John Faulkner, seeking "financial support for our work in 1980-81." The letter also detailed the company's plans for *Barabbas* and the two children's plays, *Donkey Work* and *Monster Man*, which were planned to tour to schools. Visnevski, because he had plans for productions, hoped the Council would extend them programme funding to continue their work so that they didn't have to wait for the project deadlines. Lamede's response, sent through his assistant Sarah Golding, was to once

again explain that the company had already applied for programme subsidy and had been rejected. Project applications, Lamede said, were likely to be put off until April of 1980 and would apply to work produced starting in May as "the Council cannot offer subsidy in retrospect."[62]

Cherub applied for a project grant for *Barrabas* and the two children's plays in March 1980, and Lamede responded to the application by telling them it was not likely to be funded "because of the nature of the play and the fact that you have already started touring it." Lamede advised the company to re-submit the application for just the children's plays "despite the fact that we have yet to see such work by Cherub."[63] Visnevski's response explained that the application in fact only asked for £128 pounds for *Barrabas*—"to refurbish" it for the Young Vic and to pay royalties—as it would "make the month's season at the Young Vic Studio more viable." The children's productions, he wrote, were an opportunity to work with Bernard Goss, who was "very excited about working with the Company and creating the two plays specifically for [us]."[64] Cherub was notified on May 1, 1980 that their application for funding had been rejected, as Lamede had previously intimated it would be.

Though they made several other applications over the next year, Cherub did not receive subsidy until 1981. This was £5000 for a tour of Thomas Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*. The tour followed the premiere and subsequent positive response to *THE TRIAL*, and this probably assured their funding for *Chaste Maid*. Lamede admitted in a letter that he "managed to see *THE TRIAL* at the Young Vic recently and enjoyed it a great deal."[65] Significantly, Lamede's report on *THE TRIAL* also notes that it was "a Cherub show which I actually liked." He goes on to write, "Being an old Kafka buff, I

was inclined to be even more critical than usual, so I'm being won over against some odds when I say that this show was the closest to the feel and spirit of Kafka's works that I've seen on stage." He also acknowledges "the aptness of this company's style to the work of Kafka."[66] Though the funding application was handled by the Touring Department, Lamede was aware of the application, and perhaps the combination of a different set of officers and the positive response to *THE TRIAL* greased the wheels for the application to be accepted.

The grant for *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* was the only project subsidy Cherub received from the Arts Council in its 25-year lifetime. In May 1981, just two weeks after Cherub had received the news that their previous application had been accepted, Drama Director John Faulkner notified the company that two project applications (for the forthcoming *The Journal of the Plague Year* and *Macbeth*) had not been funded. In his letter, he writes that "advisers and officers had the benefit of referring to no less than sixteen written reports and two verbal reports on seven different productions," a number, he assures Visnevski, that is more than average and that "the balance of these reports was not favorable."[67] The rejection put the company into a couple of binds. First, since plans were underway for the tour of *Macbeth*, prompted in part from their having received money to tour *Chaste Maid*, Cherub's ability to meet the scheduled demands of the *Macbeth* tour was greatly in doubt. Second, and more importantly, the company was once again in the position of having to defend itself to the ACGB, a state they believed themselves to have surpassed once they received the £5000 for *Chaste Maid*. They assumed that the funding meant that the ACGB had finally relented and that they'd have less trouble in the future securing subsidy.

Faulkner's claims require some examination. He notes that there are "16 reports" in the files, plus two verbal reports. In the ACGB archive, there are indeed 16 reports that would have been available to the advisers and officers by May 1981, and of these, nine were negative, three are mixed and four are positive, including two that are very positive (one written by Lamede himself). Lamede was responsible for four of the 16 reports, and Jon Plowman had written two. This meant more than one-third of the company's information on Cherub had come from two individuals, both drama officers with the Council. Of those six reports, four were negative, one was mixed and one was positive (Lamede's for *The Trial*). Lamede was Cherub's primary contact at the ACGB, and unlike Plowman, Lamede's tenure at the Arts Council was much longer. Standard practice was that the responsible drama officer be the one to recommend whether or not subsidy should be granted. Based on the reports he submitted on Cherub's productions, Lamede likely did not often "go to bat" for the company with the full Council (who actually were responsible for making the final decisions). No record exists of the "verbal reports" Faulkner mentions, but at least one of them could have been from Lamede himself, speaking as the primary Cherub contact person.

The company found itself in a rather Kafka-esque position: the ACGB had funded one application and then rejected another based on the same set of reports that Faulkner claimed were "not favorable." Visnevski responded to the rejection letter by writing:

> Based on [the advisers' and officers'] reactions the Company was at that time [one month earlier when *Chaste Maid* had been funded] judged worthy of financial support, and we have done *no new work since then* which might have led them to change their opinions. Does this mean that decisions are not again based on reports made in 1978 and 1979, and the consideration recently given to the reputation we have built up since last September over twenty weeks touring and several highly successful London appearances is no longer valid?[68]

Visnevski has a point. Of the sixteen reports, most of the stridently negative ones are from their early productions in 1978-79. Recent reviews of their work had been much better, which should have indicated precisely what the ACGB always said it was looking for: an improvement of standards over time. That these improvements were being made essentially without subsidy should also have boded well for the company. If one filtered out the oldest responses, Cherub should at least should have warranted a second look based on their newest productions. Visnevski was pointing out a flaw in the ACGB's rhetoric: if we've done such poor work, why did you give us money? And, of course, the real question underlying everything was the basis for the ACGB's determination that Cherub was not worthy of subsidy. Since Cherub was not allowed access to the confidential ACGB show reports, it had never received a straight answer to this question.

Lamede's response to Visnevski's letter was typically understated. He notes that "the Drama Director's letter was quite clear about the reasons for the rejection of your applications," and that there was "leeway within the system for us to proceed as we did in your case" by funding the tour of *Chaste Maid*. He concludes, "when the advisers and officers together considered all the information, it was felt that in the final analysis Cherub's work was not in the forefront when compared with that of other applicants."[69] This letter prompts a huge question of what "leeway" existed and why the ACGB saw fit to use it to fund a Cherub show when they felt the company's work was "not in the forefront." Cherub had made some rookie mistakes: the repeated asking for program subsidy when they had been warned against doing so demonstrated, to Lamede at least, that in not following the ACGB's rules, the company was not administratively ready for subsidy. Plus, the company was beginning to develop a reputation for fighting back

against the ACGB and for questioning its decisions. This surely did not ingratiate them with Lamede and Faulkner. This refusal to "play the game" would come back to haunt Cherub as it repeatedly sought subsidy from the ACGB in future years.

The Stage caught wind of the controversy (perhaps tipped off by Cherub), and in an article a spokesman for the ACGB provided another Kafka-esque twist. The article's author summed the explanation up by writing that:

> Touring money and project grants come from separate funds and applicants had to meet different sets of criteria. She [the spokesman] said the touring department had decided there was a good case for taking "A Chaste Maid…" on the road and had recommended it a guarantee. When the two project applications … were received, the drama department had given them a low priority in the present financial climate. But the *decision was no reflection on the company's work*, the spokesman stressed, only comparative importance of its chosen projects. Cherub should feel free to seek support for its next production, she added.[70]

In its explanation to *The Stage*, the ACGB's spokesman[§§] directly contradicted the explanation Cherub had been given by both Faulkner and Lamede. The spokesman did not mention "leeway" within the system, and specifically said that the decision was not based on the company's work when Faulkner had so clearly articulated that it was.

The fact offered by the ACGB's spokesman to *The Stage* that the touring department and the drama department should have separate, yet unspecified, sets of criteria must have been maddening for Cherub. They didn't know on what basis the ACGB was rejecting their applications, though they now knew that one department's criteria was so different that it allowed their funding when the other's did not. Like Joseph K in *The Trial*, Visnevski knew that the company was disliked, but they didn't know who was writing about them nor what these people's complaints were. The ACGB also had no specified policy of how to specifically address complaints nor any appeals

[§§] The identity of this person is a mystery, though the fact that the author writes "she said" leaves out the options that it's either Lamede or Faulkner.

process for those companies who were denied subsidy. In short, the company was being backed into a corner. Their shows were popular and between recurring appearances at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and national tours, the company was known and respected by both national theatre critics as well as small regional touring venues. Their international profile was also increasing: they had been invited to take *THE TRIAL* on tour to the Netherlands for the British Council, and they had already taken *Two Noble Kinsmen* to Stuttgart, Germany. Yet, they could not secure funding from the ACGB.

Macbeth

In an effort to appeal to both the ACGB and to guarantee a certain segment of audience, Cherub chose to do another widely-known play, something they'd previously attempted with *Romeo and Juliet*. In its application for funding, Cherub specifies the reason for the selection of *Macbeth*:

> *Macbeth* has been chosen as it is the principal play being studied by O level students for London, Oxford and Cambridge Examination Boards. It is considered that the colourful and visually exciting style of Cherub will make the play understandable by, [and] attractive and memorable to, the children who are studying the text.[71]

The strategy was useful because a company could guarantee a certain number of students who would come to see the play that they were studying for their exams. Cherub needed large audiences to buy tickets as the box office remained the primary source of income for the company. Administrator Vi Marriott called such audience-drawing selections "potboilers," though Cherub's selections were far from mediocre fare. The company was attempting to maintain its standards for producing work which "re-establishes theatre as an art-form,"[72] and if they were going to produce potboilers, Visnevski said, "it had to be

a potboiler which I was excited by." Cherub's potboiler choices in the early 1980s, while they may have been selected to appeal to a wider audience, were produced using typical Cherub techniques, often including white make-up and masks as well as structural changes to the texts to accommodate the smaller number of actors the company hired.

Cherub's *Macbeth* was directed by Visnevski and designed by Danusia Schejbal with Tom Hunsinger. The production was inspired by Japanese theatre, and featured stylized movement, long wigs, grotesque make-up designs, and heavy fur costumes (figure 16). "I found the play a torrent," Visnevski said, "a torrent of horror that grows, a torrent of tyranny that develops."[73] The production featured 10 actors playing all of the various roles, and lasted just under two hours without an intermission. "You let people sit through the whole torment of it, the whole torrent of it," Visnevski said. The set was comprised of a white shag carpet (part of which had been cut up to make the costumes), three sets of footlights (one downstage, and one each stage right and left) and a taut white screen, with a printed pattern that almost appears like an animal skin. The music, composed by Peter Fincham, was performed by the actors themselves. "Weird sounds and anguished cries of an alien, hellish world echo from the shadows and silhouettes that flit across a white screen," wrote Keith Nurse in *The Daily Telegraph*.[74]

The production, like other Cherub productions, was stunningly visual. As Ronald Jack reported in *The Scotsman*:

> But what gives the presentation its haunting power is its visual impact. … One such is when Macbeth, returning to visit the witches, hears news, which seems to strengthen his power. But as he lies on his back, is stripped almost naked and dragged hither and thither by the hags, the truth of his impotence before the forces of evil is clearly represented (figure 17).[75]

In this scene, Macbeth almost appears crucified, and this staged torture is in line with

several other evocative moments of violence in Cherub's productions, including the knife fight between Palamon and Arcite in *Two Noble Kinsmen* and the execution of Joseph K in *THE TRIAL*. The simultaneous offstage production was in full motion, as Visnevski had the actors not only drumming and providing sound effects, but also serving as shadows, reflecting and responding to the onstage action against the upstage screen.

Figure 16 - Macbeth (Philip Cade) and Lady Macbeth (Mary Keegan) in *Macbeth*. (photo: Chris Pearce)

Cherub opened the production at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe on August 15, 1981, where it played in repertory with *THE TRIAL*. It became Cherub's second show to play in London at the Upstream Theatre Club in November and December prior to going on a national tour from February through April of 1982 and to Israel for the Tel Aviv Festival in May of 1982. Though it was generally praised by the national critics, it was almost totally ignored by the ACGB. Only one report on the production is in the Cherub ACGB files, and it is nearly useless, focusing as it does on several of Cherub's

productions which were playing in rep at the time, and primarily deals with the production of *Journal of the Plague Year* (with which *Macbeth* played in repertory at Upstream). Mike Alfreds, the founder of Shared Experience theatre company and a member of the drama advisory panel, wrote that "[Visnevski] does have a visual sense, but, surprisingly, none spatially or directionally. … He does have a theatrical 'smell' but it's a very crude talent."[76]

Figure 17 – Macbeth is tortured by the witches. (Photo: Chris Pearce)

Despite the ACGB's consistent rejection, Cherub did have some good fortune as their relationship with the Upstream Theatre Club developed quickly, and by 1982, they became the theatre's resident company. Upstream was a part of St. Andrew's Church in The Cut, just opposite the Young Vic, and the theatre had been formed in 1977 by its

vicar, David Wickert. Cherub would play all of its productions at Upstream between 1981 and 1985 when St. Andrew's opted to dissolve the theatre due to money woes. Unlike the Young Vic's mainstage or studio, which had previously been their London venue of choice, Upstream had a small proscenium stage, with a raked audience section that forced the audience to look down on the action.

The stage space was very small, and Visnevski had to be clever with his theatricality. "Knowing that the audience was just in front of the actors," Visnevski said, "I couldn't play with them coming out so I began playing much more with things like footlights, curtains, different layers of curtains where things could be revealed or moved behind in different areas."[77] Because the company paid no rent at Upstream and shared the box office take, the residency was a lifeline. Upstream would also allow Cherub to have a very visible home in London, giving it "the much-needed chance to establish itself locally and forge the important audience links that it has already undertaken nationally," Cherub wrote in an informational document about the partnership.[78]

Critically, though it had achieved some permanence, Cherub's issues with the ACGB would come to a head. In a January 1982 article in *The Stage* titled "Cherub Seeks Grant Support," Cherub's funding issues with the ACGB would be writ large as *The Stage* once again discussed the question of Cherub's receipt of money for *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* but their subsequent rejection for subsidy for a tour of *Macbeth*. "I am not fighting the Arts Council," Visnevski was quoted as saying, "but I want them to be more aware of outside opinion, particularly the opinion of critics and directors."[79] Cherub began to seek support directly from its audience, asking them to write to the ACGB and tell them to reconsider Cherub's funding. A move made out of desperation, it

would have significant consequences for the company.

Notes

[1] Ben Ormerod, personal interview with author, Dec. 16, 2010.

[2] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, Dec. 12, 2010.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Feliks Topolski, *Fourteen Letters* (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1988), n.p.

[5] Yvonne Roberts, "Artist with Fireworks," *Telegraph Sunday Magazine*, August 17, 1980, 37.

[6] "Jonathan," Drama Officer's Report, June 25, 1979, ACGB Archive, V&A Theatre and Performance Archives, London, UK.

[7] Visnevski, interview, August 17, 2005.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Scott Berkun, *The Myths of Innovation* (Sebastapol, CA: O'Reilly Media, Inc., 2010), 10.

[11] Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 46. (see ch. I, note 41)

[12] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," 81. (see ch. I, note 32)

[13] Visnevski, interview, August 17, 2005.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ormerod, interview.

[17] Paul Hegarty, personal interview with author, Dec. 16, 2010.

[18] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, Dec. 16, 2010.

[19] Mary Keegan, personal interview with author, Dec. 17, 2010.

[20] David Acton, personal interview with author, Dec. 17, 2010.

[21] Visnevski, interview with author, Dec. 12, 2010.

[22] Hegarty, interview.

[23] George Hauger, introduction to *Ghelderode: 7 Plays*, ed. Hauger (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), viii.

[24] Michel de Ghelderode, "Introductory Note to *Barabbas*," in *Ghelderode: 7 Plays*, ed. George Hauger (New York: Hill and Wang, 1960), 47.

[25] Andrew Visnevski, email message to author, January 16, 2012.

[26] Alison Graham. "Romeo and Juliet in Jeans and Tee-shirts." Review of *Romeo and Juliet* by Cherub Company. Review unsourced (likely *Hereford Times*, review for performance at Nell Gwynne Theatre in Hereford), cOct. 2, 1980, Cherub Archive.

[27] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 12, 2010.

[28] Andrew Visnevski, personal interview with author, August 24, 2005.

[29] Visnevski, interview, August 24, 2005.

[30] See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary* (London: Methuen and Co Ltd., 1964), 44-47.

[31] Jeremy Myerson, "Young Vic – The Trial," review of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* by Cherub Company, *The Stage*, September 25, 1980, 16.

[32] Francis King, "Sky Pilots," review of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* by Cherub Company, *Sunday Telegraph*, August 31, 1980.

[33] Hegarty, interview.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Simon Shepherd, *The Cambridge Introduction to Modern British Theatre* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 179.

[36] Jonah Lehrer, "Groupthink: The Brainstorming Myth," *New Yorker*, January 30, 2012, 24.

[37] Andrew Visnevski, *Kafka's THE TRIAL*, unpublished manuscript, Cherub Archive, 1.

[38] Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 1.

[39] Visnevski, *THE TRIAL*, 7.

[40] Acton, interview.

[41] Andrew Visnevski, email message to author, August 26, 2005.

[42] Visnevski, interview, August 24, 2005.

[43] Visnevski, *THE TRIAL*,13.

[44] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 12, 2010.

[45] Visnevski, *THE TRIAL*,19.

[46] Kafka, *The Trial*, 29.

[47] Visnevski, *THE TRIAL*, 22.

[48] Hegarty, interview.

[49] Visnevski, *THE TRIAL*, 28.

[50] Ibid, 55.

[51] Visnevski, letter, March, 30, 2012.

[52] Ibid, 77.

[53] Visnevski, interview, August 24, 2005.

[54] Steve Grant, "The Trial," review of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* by Cherub Company, *Time Out*, September 19, 1980.

[55] John Elsom, "Lest they forget," review of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* by Cherub Company, *The Listener*, September 25, 1980, 418.

[56] Doreen and Silvia Saddleton, "The View from the Audience," *unfetter'd: The Cherub Company London Newsletter*, Spring 1999, Cherub Archive, 2.

[57] Visnevski, interview, August 24, 2005.

[58] Program for "Degenerate!" season, Cherub Company London, Riverside Studios, 2001, Cherub Archive.

[59] Andrew Visnevski, "Q&A," *unfetter'd: The Cherub Company London Newsletter*, Spring 2001, Cherub Archive, 1. [Emphasis in original.]

[60] Siobhan Murphy, "degenerate!" review of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* by Cherub Company, *Metro*, February 27, 2001.

[61] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Andrew Visnevski, August 7, 1979, Cherub Archive.

[62] Sarah Golding (for Jonathan Lamede), letter to Andrew Visnevski, February 27, 1980, Cherub Archive.

[63] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Andrew Visnevski, March 25, 1980, Cherub Archive.

[64] Andrew Visnevski, letter to Jonathan Lamede, March 27, 1980, Cherub Archive.

[65] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Andrew Visnevski, January 30, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[66] Jonathan Lamede, ACGB Drama Officer Report, April 2, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[67] John Faulkner, letter to Andrew Visnevski, May 14, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[68] Andrew Visnevski, letter to John Faulkner, May 26, 1981, Cherub Archive. [Emphasis in original.]

[69] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Andrew Visnevski, May 28, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[70] *The Stage,* June 18, 1981. [Emphasis mine.]

[71] ACGB Application for Subsidy: *Journal of the Plague Year* and *Macbeth,* April 1981, ACGB Archive.

[72] "The Cherub Company at the Upstream Theatre Club," undated information guide, c1982, Cherub Archive.

[73] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 12, 2010.

[74] Keith Nurse, "Macbeth in an Alien World," review of *Macbeth* by Cherub Company, *The Daily Telegraph*, Nov 20, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[75] Ronald Jack, "Macbeth," review of *Macbeth* by Cherub Company, *The Scotsman*, Aug. 18, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[76] Mike Alfreds, Show Report, November 13, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[77] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 12, 2010.

[78] Undated information guide. (see note 70)

[79] "Cherub Seeks Grant Support," *The Stage*, January 21, 1982, Cherub Archive.

CHAPTER IV

1982-89: FRAYING THE FRINGE

"No one has complained since Wednesday. Now they've been told they can enjoy it, they do."
– Theatre staff to Joe Orton after his play *Loot* won the *Evening Standard* Award

In a self-published "retrospective" of the company's work over the first six years of its existence, titled "Fraying the Fringe," the Cherub Company attempted to call attention to the state it was in. Including both photographs and reviews, "Fraying the Fringe" briefly records each of the nineteen shows they produced between 1978 and 1984, all created "without the benefit of sustained financial support."

> We have mounted fifteen original productions, three shows for children, and a poetry programme; undertaken six national tours; appeared at seven British Festivals [including the Edinburgh Fringe]; appeared abroad in Stuttgart, Bern, Liege, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and toured for the British Council in Belgium, Holland, West Germany and Egypt. In every year, we work an average of 40 weeks, play forty-five different venues, give 170 performances, and visit three countries outside the UK. Over a period of five years, out of seventeen project applications to the Arts Council, sixteen have been turned down.[1]

With what must have been a mix of determination, luck and a whole lot of favors (which the document clearly acknowledges), the Cherub Company had done the impossible: it had survived for an extended period without any subsidy from the Arts Council, and with a very healthy resume to boot. However: "we cannot continue," the company cautions in "Fraying the Fringe," "if we are constantly on the scrounge, underpaid, on the trot, knocking around the UK and Europe in third-hand vans that unexpectedly burst into flame. The time has now come when the Company needs to have security and some financial basis on which to work." In spite of these hopes, the security the company was seeking would never come.

To operate without subsidy is a remarkable achievement, but the efforts necessary to achieve that survival affected the company's primary resource: its production work. As they allude in "Fraying the Fringe," the company could not grow; it remained listed in sources such as *The British Alternative Theatre Directory* as a small-scale touring company. In contrast, companies like Cheek by Jowl, which began at around the same time, moved up the ladder to middle-scale and beyond. Cherub's efforts to sustain itself, in tandem with the lack of funding, so distracted them from creating new productions that by the end of the 1980s, it would be relegated to the distant fringes of British theatre. Early in the decade, Cherub's production of *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (1981) was partially funded by the ACGB, and alongside *THE TRIAL* (1980) and *Macbeth* (1981), the company was touring widely. These productions were joined by *Twelfth Night* (1982) with its multiple international tours of from 1982-89; all were great Cherub successes. But Cherub also created a number of other productions which were not as successful, and it suffered a huge blow in 1985 with the loss of its home base at the Upstream Theatre Club when the church that housed it decided not to continue to run the theatre. After this, Cherub was increasingly homeless and penniless.

The year 1984 also marks the beginning of the ACGB's most ardent professionalization pushes, a trend which paralleled similar activity in Thatcherite Britain more widely. With more and more artists seeking money from an ever-shrinking pot, the ACGB decided to revise its expectations for how funding should be allocated. Ian Brown has described one of the primary strategies of professionalization, the "company appraisal scheme," as practiced by the ACGB:

> Under this system, in all art forms, teams of independent assessors and officers visited companies to review financial need, artistic performance and management

> practices. They then made recommendations for the future of the companies and sought to establish an appropriate level of funding in agreement, as appropriate, with RAAs and local authorities. This system was derived by [Deputy Secretary-General] Anthony Everitt to answer a concern felt by [Council Chairman] William Rees-Mogg that the arts might be poorly managed, a Thatcherite stance with monetarist foundations. [2]

The neoliberal approach to the arts was to turn it into a business, and though public funding for the arts remained, undoubtedly the end-goal of professionalization was to eventually create companies that were self-sustaining, either through box office revenue alone, or through associations with corporations or private donors. Peacock notes that the ACGB had specific expectations for the companies it funded under the new approach:

> Clients were now required to report on staffing levels, financial practices and how far they had been able to match the council's funding with that from business and local authorities. In addition they were expected to have devised an education policy and to have extended opportunities and employment for members of ethnic minorities.[3]

Companies were also increasingly expected to develop an identity that articulated who their primary audience was (ethnic/regional/national) and how their work served the public interest. In other words, the ACGB was expecting that funded companies be both efficient and have a positive use-value in order both to be granted and to continue to receive subsidy.

The urge to professionalize artists significantly affected companies like Cherub, whose innovative and experimental approach to production was in direct contrast to a model which required the company to codify its strengths to create a defined "identity." Cherub, under Visnevski, while it had defining characteristics, never sought to codify itself, and this presented a challenge because the company's silence allowed others (mostly outside the company) to do the codifying. This placed the company in its dicey situation with the ACGB, who had consistently rejected any applications for project

funding. As the company was not funded, it could not meet most of the ACGB's expectations: Cherub could not afford to hire a staff nor develop a long-term plan when it had no guaranteed money. Both artistically and structurally, Cherub was seen by the ACGB as a bad investment. Thus, the company sought other opportunities, largely in the form of international tours under the aegis of the British Council (BC).

Cherub's *Twelfth Night*, with numerous cast changes for a variety of different BC tours over seven years, in essence became a Cherub franchise, a consistently replicated version of the original production. Eventually the company was spending more time remounting this production – it was their financial lifeline – and they often had little time or money to produce new shows. Certainly they could not produce at the rate that they had between 1978 and 1984. While the company's notoriety grew internationally, in the UK, with few new productions, they were basically left behind and forgotten. Worse for Cherub, the ACGB began to recognize other "physical theatre" companies who were emerging in the late 80s; the ACGB's focus on these companies would essentially take the attention permanently away from Cherub. After years of BC tours, the company took a three-year hiatus after they produced *The Duchess of Malfi* in London in 1989, and would return as a mere shadow of its former self in 1992. As Visnevski told me, "There was a new generation and our reputation had gone."[4]

The Letter Campaign

Many of Cherub's difficulties can be attributed directly to their relationship with the ACGB. Cherub had not taken their lack of acknowledgement from the Arts Council without a fight, as the controversy over the funding of *Chaste Maid* and the subsequent

denial of their next application showed. Though the company had many friends in RAA representatives, regional theatre managers and theatre critics, the daily work of the company was still a largely volunteer operation. Visnevski, after the departure of Simon Chandler, was very much a one-man show at Cherub, and while Vi Marriott assisted him from afar in the early years of the company, she still primarily served as Frank Dunlop's assistant at the Young Vic until Cherub began to tour widely in the mid-1980s. The company could not afford to hire any full-time staff, and in the early 1980s Visnevski added the responsibility of managing the company to his directing duties, all of this work unpaid. Visnevski was under the strain of having to run his expanding company, and the strain was beginning to show. No matter how hopeful he seemed to the actors and crew, he clearly had doubts about how long the company could go on.

In their increasing desperation for funds, Visnevski and Cherub were about to undertake a major miscalculation in their standoff with the ACGB. The company had been making constant appeals to its audience for financial support since its early days, usually through a note in the program acknowledging that they received no financial assistance. Eventually, they began to make a direct appeal for their audience to write to the Arts Council in support of Cherub's effort for subsidy. They posted letters from the council in the lobby in the theatres they performed in, and handed around circulars that explained the company's financial status and listed the Arts Council's address with the plea, "If you have enjoyed the show, please help us by writing to say so. … Your enthusiasm will help to persuade them we are worthy of support."[5] The ACGB's officers and advisers saw the display when they attended performances, and the Council also began receiving letters. In a letter to Visnevski in July 1981, Drama Director John

Faulkner closes by saying, "I have no objection to your displaying this letter alongside other correspondence from the Council."[6] The campaign was a desperate effort to obtain funds to grow the company, and though Faulkner's comment is one of the few explicit comments about the letter writing campaign in any of the archive documents, the ACGB must have been infuriated. Out of courtesy, if not actual ACGB policy, the letters had to be responded to, and this took up time the drama department's staff could have been spending on other matters.

Cherub's audience could not help but become aware of the company's plight as they were confronted with it the moment they entered the theatre. In *1956 and All That*, Rebellato employs Immanuel Kant's theory of *parerga* to describe the Royal Court's zeal to develop a strictly playwright-centered theatre. He writes that the directors of the Royal Court recognized that "figures like the critic, publicist, publisher, even the box-office staff and programme seller act as intermediaries between audience and stage, framing and perhaps shaping the theatrical event."[7] Kant described the parergon as the frame or ornamentation around an artistic work, one that contributes to the viewer's understanding and reception of the piece but which was not inherently part of the work itself (i.e. – the frame around a painting in a museum).

Jacques Derrida criticizes Kant's description and goes a step further, writing that though the frame may not be *of* the work, it is not totally separate from it either, and in fact it is up to the viewer to make the distinction between one and the other. Sometimes making this distinction is a rather complicated act, as Derrida writes:

> Every analytic of aesthetic judgement presupposes that we can rigorously distinguish between the intrinsic and the extrinsic. Aesthetic judgment must concern intrinsic beauty, and not the around and about. It is therefore necessary to know – this is the fundamental presupposition, the foundation – how to define the

> intrinsic, the framed, and what to exclude as frame and beyond the frame. We are thus already at the unlocatable center of the problem. And since, when we ask, "What is a frame?" Kant responds, "It is a parergon, a composite of inside and outside, but a composite which is not an amalgam or half-and-half, an outside which is called inside the inside to constitute it as inside."[8]

In other words, Derrida says that Kant's description of the parergon as being extrinsic is not always as simple as it sounds, because that relies upon an unproven supposition, namely, that one can in fact distinguish the extrinsic from the intrinsic or, even if one can, that everyone would agree on the same division point. Derrida demonstrates that our understanding/view of an artistic work is always shaped by the parerga; our experience of art is always mediated by the extrinsic. Rebellato uses Derrida's reformulation of parerga to explain some of the changes undertaken by the leaders of the Royal Court to the theatre's physical space (for one, they removed the ornamented proscenium arch as they felt its opulence competed with the presentation of the play) to curtail the extrinsic aspects of the audience experience. In order to fulfil their playwright-centered mission and present the written plays in as perfect a way as possible, Rebellato writes, "these too were drawn into the author's sphere of control."[9]

For Cherub's audience, their perception of the company's plays was mediated by several extrinsic factors, not the least of which were the small theatres the company played in, as well as its portrayal of itself in the lobbies of those theatres as an entity which was stuck playing in those small theatres because it had been maligned and badly used by the ACGB. To earn money through ticket revenue, Cherub toured widely, and most of the time audiences would interact with the company at one of these theatres across the UK. Cherub did not have the luxury of being choosy about where it performed, nor could it control what other productions had been put up recently that

audiences may have seen. Visnevski remembered one incident in Buxton:

> It was a packed house for *THE TRIAL* because we had all the London publicity with us. And at the interval, a woman approached me, and remember this is the Buxton Festival, these are the middle-class property owners of Derbyshire. "Did you direct this play?" I thought she was coming to praise me because it was going so well, and so, full of enthusiasm, I said, "yes." "Well I don't know how you expect people to come to theatre to see such things." I can't remember whether she said it was "the most punishing experience," but something like that and she stormed off. I was obviously brought low because I thought that high art of central European quality would inspire everybody. But obviously it made some people very angry because at a festival they expected to be entertained.[10]

When in London, Cherub was performing in small fringe theatres, of which Upstream was one, and the company itself became known as a Fringe company. This was not a description that Cherub sought, as it saw its lack of funding as preventing it from acquiring grander digs.

As Sara Freeman has documented, the term "fringe" originally referred to location, specifically the performance sites of companies who had taken the opportunity of the Edinburgh Festival to promote their own work, thus inaugurating what would become the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Later alternative companies claimed the title as a marker of difference; as Freeman writes, "by the 1970s, critics were using the term in this light, employing it in particular for theatre that expressed the stirrings of the liberal counter-culture."[11] Significant tension exists between being "fringe" and one step above amateur-status (and hoping for eventual entrée into the mainstream), and being "Fringe" by proudly declaring that you reject mainstream theatre and choose to operate outside it. Cherub did not see itself as part of the "liberal counter-culture," nor did it have a political mission. It viewed the designation of fringe as a marker of location, not of opposition; for Cherub, fringe meant operating on the fringes, outside the center. Cherub was a company who specifically wanted to re-ignite mainstream theatrical practice, and though

they did not wish to replicate mainstream theatre, they also did not wish to remain on the margins of it. By indicating that it was "Fraying the Fringe" in its 1984 self-published account, the company intended to convey that they had successfully conquered the fringe and were ready for bigger and better things. This desire was exacerbated by the feeling that the ACGB was deliberately preventing them from reaching greater heights.

The lobby display of letters of support and missives from the ACGB's staff mitigated the audience's experience of the play, as it was designed to do. The story Cherub would later tell in "Fraying the Fringe" was modified slightly from the one that it had originally told in its program notes: that it was a small, talented company of players who only sought money so that they could continue to create productions for the enjoyment and enrichment of their audiences. It was a calculated, desperate and effective move: many audience members who had enjoyed the production they saw wrote letters to express support and sympathy (and some may also have included a donation). The way Cherub came to be understood by its audience was as a poor, maligned company, and the parerga in the lobby contributed to this view. The ACGB's officers encountered it too, and perhaps their critical assessment was tempered by it; after all, "poor" and "maligned" seem to perfectly describe a company on the fringe, and the ACGB's feelings about the company's artistic merit demonstrate that the Council's staff saw no reason to help Cherub escape the designation. For audiences, perhaps each success that the company had in fringe theatres suggested that Fringe was part of Cherub's identity, and so it saw Cherub's work as belonging to the world of artistic challenge. Certainly, though Cherub never wanted to remain poor, its poverty had prompted some exceptionally creative work to which the audience responded positively. As time went on, even as the company

found success touring internationally, within the UK it was always seen as (f/F)ringe.

The effort behind lobbying the ACGB was to acquire financial support for the company to grow. Visnevski even wrote to Faulkner to assure the ACGB that Cherub's intent wasn't to criticize but rather to explain to the audience that the company didn't receive subsidy: "the people who like our work always tend to believe we are sufficiently funded," he wrote. Visnevski explained that Cherub was trying both to raise awareness of the issue and to demonstrate to the ACGB how much support the company had. "We hope that in this way, we might gain the Council's understanding of what we are aiming to achieve, and recognition that if we are able to produce work of that standard and popularity, we might merit future assistance."[12] The lobby display was effective, and indeed, it even worked on some of those people who were sent by the ACGB to review the production. RAA representative Joyce Cheeseman, in her report to the ACGB on *THE TRIAL*, wrote:

> I came out wondering what on earth the Arts Council were doing not to give them total subsidy, and then I talked to Andrew V. Polish and very excitable. … They had issued a booklet asking us all to write to John Faulkner and complain in which it was disclosed that they don't pay Equity rates. I brought this up, very gently, and received a storm of anger – how could they when they had so little money, etc. Su [her friend] suggested that they could if they perhaps cut the size of their company which met with even more storm – no they were a group and must stick together and be profit-sharing. They needed all their company to put on these important versions of neglected classics which nobody else in the whole country was doing. … [H]e looks like a rather intractable bloke who won't cut his clothes to suit his cloth and who having been highly successful with small cast plays is getting bigger and bigger ideas and refuses to accept the current financial situation. I know if he came to our drama panel, I would probably want to refuse him a grant too. Which is a terrible shame because the work is excellent.[13]

Cheeseman's meeting with Visnevski at this highly volatile moment in Cherub's lifetime was unfortunate timing indeed. Had he not talked to Cheeseman and her colleague in this manner, Cheeseman would likely have written to the ACGB in support

of the company. Her review of *THE TRIAL* was otherwise very glowing, and she herself admits that she sympathized with the company's portrayal of itself. She may have even gone to bat for them with the ACGB (as indeed several other RAA members would do later). However, for Cheeseman, her own parergic experience was not only the lobby display, but also a young, committed director who was perhaps a bit overwhelmed by the work involved in keeping his company together on a shoe-string.

Many Cherub company members, as well as Visnevski himself, remember that he was often not the best advocate for the company with the powers-that-be; usually quite shy and reserved, he tended to come off as standoffish to those who did not know him. Critically, in his interaction with Cheeseman, the major bone of contention is over the size of the company. In fairness, Cherub's production of *THE TRIAL* featured only five actors, and *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (which was playing in rep with *THE TRIAL* at Buxton where Cheeseman saw the show) featured ten. The cast size for nearly all Cherub productions in the 1980s was between five and ten, and considering that they were largely presenting Elizabethan and Jacobean plays written for much larger casts, this could be seen as an economical choice. Cheeseman's comment that Visnevski had been "successful with small-cast plays" actually misunderstood the sacrifices and the emphasis on efficiency that the company had made from its earliest days.

Visnevski's tirade was also prompted by a much deeper sense of loyalty to both his company and its mission. He was keen to have a consistent company of compatriots who were accustomed to his style and way of working, and Cheeseman's suggestion that he jettison some of the group who had stuck by him in these particularly lean times was clearly unthinkable to him. The company's emphasis on producing "neglected classics"

was a central part of their mission, and though they would diverge from it periodically, Visnevski was still keen to resuscitate a theatre which he felt had become stilted and overly naturalistic. The type of plays Cherub chose was as important as how they performed them: the vision Visnevski had for theatre was a return to theatricality and meaning that was best expressed through the experimentation and re-creation of classical texts, especially those that had been ignored or forgotten.

The incident with Cheeseman came in the wake of the exchange of letters following the funding of *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* and the rejection of proposals for *Journal of the Plague Year* and *Macbeth*, and Cheeseman's suggestions, striking at the very heart of the Cherub project, were the initial salvos in a push from the ACGB for Cherub to change its ways or perish. Three weeks after Cheeseman saw *THE TRIAL*, in September 1981, Lamede responded to a letter from Visnevski, who had asked about other options for raising money if the ACGB were not to continue funding them. Lamede gave Visnevski the information for the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA), an organization which assists companies with corporate sponsorship (and led by former Arts Council Chairman Lord Goodman). He also advised:

> I wonder whether now is not the time to do what any company, subsidized or not, should do; namely, to reappraise your operation in terms of its costs and the total resources available to you. In other words, it might be necessary to rethink on the lines of cutting your coat to suit the cloth you have, rather than the cloth you expect to get. This is, after all, what any drama company has to do.[14]

Though Visnevski could not have known it at the time, Lamede had obviously read Cheeseman's report and now redirected her advice to "cut his clothes to suit his cloth," which he almost certainly read in her report, thus bringing the unfortunate lobby encounter full-circle. To Visnevski, of course, it reinforced the idea that the ACGB was

expecting him to surrender.

He did not do so, though without subsidy, the company was forced to continue touring to small venues around the country where they would take in just enough money to cover their costs. Depending on the theatre, Cherub charged a flat rate per performance; for *Twelfth Night* in 1983, it was £400 per performance, plus housing provided by the receiving theatre. The actors and staff were usually paid around £100 per week, and money had to be paid for National Insurance, publicity, laundry, gasoline and vehicle repairs, etc. For a show like *THE TRIAL* or *Twelfth Night,* both of which had only six actors and two crew members, the costs were manageable and usually there was some money left over or at worst the books were balanced. But larger casts meant greater expenses, which meant asking the receiving theatres for greater fees, and some of those village theatres had difficulty raising even the £400 payments (which is where the RAAs stepped in with assistance). Cherub could not continue to afford to produce large-cast shows without subsidy. Visnevski's dream was to be able to produce the plays he wanted with the casts he wanted and for everyone to be paid for their work. Cheeseman and Lamede were telling him, on behalf of the Arts Council, that he needed to give up on this dream.

Before he would do so, he wanted to know why what he was doing was unacceptable, though typically the ACGB was not forthcoming with that information. In an earlier letter to the ACGB, Visnevski had asked for "guidance for the future and clarification of the criteria on which the work of companies is assessed." I have found no letter directly replying to this query in either the ACGB or the Cherub archives. Many times over the years, Cherub asked for some guidance from the Council on how they

might improve themselves in its eyes. They were not privy to the confidential reports that the ACGB used to evaluate the company, and beyond what little Lamede or Faulkner would discuss in letters, Visnevski did not know who was objecting to his work nor what they were saying. Over time, the ACGB had taken pride in having its officers and directors be able to make case-by-case assessments of companies. The professional staff was accustomed to getting its own way in making the bulk of the decisions. These decisions were not the result of any group consensus, because even though various panels were set up to make the official "decision," rarely were the recommendations of individual officers overturned. Further, the staff seems to have chosen what outside opinions were valuable to consider and which were not.

Cheeseman's otherwise glowing review was no doubt largely ignored by the ACGB's professional staff because she had qualified it by saying she'd not recommend the company for subsidy after Visnevski's tirade. This likely suited them just fine, as it fit the narrative they had developed about the company. The professional staff had clearly made the decision to ignore Cherub, and this decision was essentially final. The ACGB was not a democratic organization, as Deputy Secretary-General Eric Walter White had noted in 1975:

> The aim has been swift and positive action whenever possible, not to be afraid of inconsistency and to realize that in the arts a certain liveliness is preferable to a cold and egalitarian symmetry. It has been a part of the faith of the Arts Council that these ends can only be achieved by considering each project as a separate venture and not by creating a series of regulations which will have a routine application throughout the country.[15]

When deciding who received subsidy and who did not, the ACGB's staff did not have to worry about maintaining consistent policies toward different companies or projects. In Cherub's case, the advisory panel members who were sent to Cherub's shows were

usually in agreement with the views of the professional staff, though it wouldn't likely have mattered much if they had differed because the advisers truly had little power. Sinclair reports the story of a meeting of the drama advisory panel where after hours of discussion, the Drama Director John Faulkner told the members, "I cannot guarantee to pass on your recommendations to the Council."[16] And the problem was not limited to Faulkner's management; Sinclair notes that at some point after Faulkner's departure from the ACGB, half of the members of a later drama panel resigned "in protest against the disregard of their views."[17] The officers were making the decisions largely based on their own personal standards summed up in the reports they wrote on the productions they attended. Because the reports were confidential, the ACGB's reviewers could write what they pleased, safe in the knowledge that they wouldn't be pressed to explain themselves.

The lobby-display parerga was not without impact, however, and the ACGB's staff had to contend with the many letters sent to question their decision on Cherub. The letters which remain in the ACGB's archive are from audience members (and even theatre critics) willing to publically declare their support for the company and its work. Cherub's campaign was also bolstered by letters of support from several people representing the theatres and the RAAs that Cherub had worked with around the UK. When Stephen Boyce, a theatre officer with Southern Arts wrote to Lamede in 1982, it touched a nerve, in part because of Boyce's defense of Cherub but also because Boyce had copied his letter to Visnevski.

In defense of the company's production of *Macbeth*, Boyce wrote that he "was impressed by this production… [and] by the Company's own commitment to the

production which was evident in the confidence and sensitivity of their playing." He went on:

> It seems to me that the Company is being penalized because of the way it has polarized opinion. The very fact that the work is both popular and original is, to my mind, good reason for supporting it, particularly when ultimately it is presenting a clear and accessible version of a classic play. … Stylistically the production was undoubtedly controversial, but it was also competent and interesting. The Cherub Company's work continues to be in very great demand from a large number of venues in the region. They attract a large and enthusiastic following. This is a case where success needs to be acknowledged…and rewarded.[18]

In other words, Boyce was challenging the ACGB's definition of Cherub. It was, according to Boyce, a popular company with "accessible" and "competent" productions that attracted audiences, a powerful motivator for any theatre producer. So what if some people hate the work, it sells!

Lamede's response was predictable, and he basically ignores most of what Boyce says about Cherub as it didn't fit how he had chosen to view the company. "I really don't see that the company is being penalized in any sense of the word. As Andrew Visnevski himself knows, … we have gone out of our way to reach a fair assessment of Cherub." The real issue for Lamede is not Boyce's defense of the company, but rather that the company would know of Boyce's opinion because Visnevski had received a copy of the original letter. The vaunted confidentiality that the ACGB so prized was being violated. Lamede wrote to Boyce: "Personal views may be one thing but I think I can speak for my colleagues when I say that we would never contemplate simply copying internal comments on official headed paper to a third party."[19] Boyce replied that he didn't feel it important to keep his feelings secret from companies: "It would be inconsistent, to say the least, if I had one view for the Arts Council and another for the company."[20]

Neither consistency nor transparency was a high priority for the ACGB's staff, and they went out of their way to ensure that the show reports generated by its staff were viewed only by other ACGB members. In part, this was a prophylactic measure which allowed ACGB staff and any theatre artists who were associated with the ACGB to report on productions without being constrained by how their views would be interpreted by the companies whose productions they viewed. The problem with the lack of transparency was two-fold: first, it obviously would allow any personal grudges the ACGB's reviewers held against various companies to be exercised when they reported on the productions. The theatre world was small, and everyone knew or knew of everyone else. Many of the reports on Cherub are written by directors of other alternative theatre companies, and one can only speculate on how tempting it might be for the director of one company to subvert the work of another, particularly in a time of increased competition over decreasing amounts of artistic subsidy. The second problem with the lack of transparency was that it prevented companies from addressing the concerns raised in the reports. Despite what the ACGB might have said publically about watching companies develop over time to determine their suitability for subsidy, the reality was that the ACGB was not in the business of improving the work of any theatre company. The lack of feedback is testament to this. The ACGB was instead legitimizing a particular type of theatre that its staff viewed as excellent, and funding the companies who fit into that very vague definition.

In his second letter, Boyce also raises a very interesting question, one which the Arts Council itself would have been struggling with at that very time. Boyce, a representative of an RAA, questions the comparative importance of the views of RAA

members versus ACGB staff or advisors. He writes, "I suspect [the issue of funding for Cherub] is due to the principle which underlies the problem, namely the extent to which Regional Arts Association Officers are able to contribute to the process of assessment, or more precisely, the extent to which that contribution is taken into account."[21] In this period, the ACGB was increasingly mired in a strong effort by both the RAAs and the Thatcher government to loosen its stranglehold on arts subsidy. Boyce and Lamede were arguing at the same time that others working for the Council were preparing the report that would be published as *Glory of the Garden* (1984). In this report, the ACGB laid out a new strategy for devolving some amount of central control of arts subsidy to the RAAs. Many on the Council fought this mightily, remembering perhaps the words of former Chairman Lord Goodman: "It is idiotic that the regions, which are pretty barren of talent, should run the show. You can't find that in Wigan or Warrington. They need a hard centre."[22] This was, of course, easy for Goodman to say when his agency, the ACGB, essentially controlled the standards by which people were judged to have "talent."

Many in the ACGB resisted the move toward devolution in part because of their own jobs, but also because they were still upholding the idea of "raise and spread." When the movement toward devolution began in the mid 1970s, Goodman spoke in the ACGB's defense:

> This is the belief that because standards have been set by the traditional arts and because those arts are little enjoyed by the broad mass of people, the concept of quality is 'irrelevant.' The term cultural democracy has been invoked by those who think in this way, to describe a policy which rejects discrimination between good and bad and cherishes the romantic notion that there is a 'cultural dynamism' in the people which will emerge only if they can be liberated from the cultural values hitherto accepted by an elite…[23]

In other words, Goodman felt that without the ACGB as the arbiter of culture, culture as

he knew it would die. Throughout the 1980s, the ACGB would not substantially depart from Goodman's view.

The dream that Matthew Arnold had put forth in the 19th century was still well alive in the ACGB: the idea that one day, by preserving "culture" or "Art,"—"the best which has been thought and said in the world," as Arnold put it—and by spreading it around, one would raise the entirety of humanity, eliminating class divisions. Eliminating the arbiter then, or so some in the ACGB believed, was simply caving in to mediocrity. Sir Roy Shaw, Secretary General of the ACGB (1975-83) said,

> Surprisingly, Matthew Arnold detected this trend over a century ago when he wrote that: 'Plenty of people will try to give the masses, as they call them, an intellectual food prepared and adjusted in the way they think proper for the actual condition of the masses.' This is sometimes called 'giving the public what it wants,' but it really means giving the public what it can most easily be persuaded to accept.[24]

Long-time staff like Lamede and Faulkner appear to have held similar views, and Cherub did not meet their expectations for excellence. In the reports and correspondence from the ACGB staff going forward, the officers begin to articulate from around 1982 onward that a permanent decision had been made about Cherub, and that no external views would alter their decision.

Cherub's *Twelfth Night*

By 1982, Cherub had produced 12 shows, and through the early part of the year, its production of *Macbeth* toured the UK and made a brief trip overseas to a festival in Israel, along with *Kafka's THE TRIAL*. In a letter written in January 1982, Visnevski wrote to a friend: "I have no fixed plans for [an August] Edinburgh Season except retirement. … So, I would be interested to hear your plans to see if I change my mind

about retiring…"[25] In the spring, Visnevski was enticed by Frank Dunlop to direct a Young Vic production of *Romeo and Juliet*, a production which would feature a multi-racial cast (the Montague family was cast as Black, while the Capulets were white) and which no doubt eased some of the bad memories of Cherub's own production of the play. Visnevski was also at the time going back and forth with the playwright John Spurling on the subject of Cherub premiering a new play, initially a religious-themed play called *Passion*, but the plans would shift and Cherub would eventually produce Spurling's *Coming Ashore in Guadeloupe* (1982), an exploration of the discovery of America as seen from the perspective of the indigenous people. After a brief run at the Harrogate Festival, the production opened at the Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh on August 15, 1982. The newspaper reviews for Cherub's first "new" play (at least one not written by Visnevski nor based on another text) were excellent, though Cherub had a less than pleasant time at Edinburgh. As Visnevski would tell me later, the Assembly Rooms had a more "sausage factory way of working," and he "had been used to a more caring and creative theatre environment."[26] He began to believe that the Edinburgh Festival was undergoing changes which were professionalizing the festival, leading to a less welcoming and adventurous artistic environment than he had previously experienced.

Returning from Edinburgh, Visnevski and the company planned a return to producing plays set for study by schoolchildren, as they had done with *Macbeth* the previous year. This time they chose a Shakespearean comedy, *Twelfth Night*. The production was planned to premiere at Upstream in October, and it would then play in repertory with *Coming Ashore.* The majority of the six-person cast of *Coming Ashore* in Edinburgh carried over into the London production of the play, and Visnevski set about

planning to make *Twelfth Night* work with only those six actors. Visnevski:

> I find that the stage is […] my canvas, and I paint shapes and mould shapes out of actors, costumes, props. So it's an aesthetic exercise, although I believe that theatre has a role to play beyond aesthetics, and that is something that people find difficult: that somebody as aesthetically conscious as me should actually have a mission. And my mission is to sensually transmit the message of the play and transport the audience into the world of the play, draw them into the world of the play, bombard them with the world of the play, but at the same time, make them leave, having imbibed a particular kind of idea that is transmitted through the play.[27]

Cherub's production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* was stunning, not because it was an overt spectacle, but because of the simplicity of direction, design and performance. Based on circus artifice and Marc Chagall's paintings (specifically the image of a flying bridegroom), the show features a cast of six with an almost-uncut text. As in Terry Hands' 1979 RSC production and a 1975 Bulgarian production where he "conjured the tempest that would bring Viola […and] the whole work became his fairytale,"[28] Feste (figure 18) became the central figure who dominated the storytelling and controlled the world of the play, honoring the Feast of Misrule and the topsy-turviness (the servant as temporary master) that comes with it. A benevolent trickster who embodied the celebratory aspects of the festival, Cherub's Feste masked himself onstage as "he becomes the Captain that saves Viola, […] the clown that reawakens light in Olivia, […] Antonio that saves Sebastian," Visnevski said. "He's the priest that does all the marriages, he's the one who brings everybody together."[29]

With four blue drapes, a large circular carpet[*], a wicker theatrical skip, two wood and chicken-wire horses, a white wooden box and six free-standing poles attached with

[*] Visnevski: "We did it with a floor that was the left-over floor from our production from *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, which had been a square of rush carpet that I was allowed to cut off the floor of a temporary apartment of Paul Foot, the journalist. […] I prized that carpet and that carpet became the circus-shaped floor because I had this vision of - back to childhood - circuses, clowns and circuses." (Interview with author, 17 August 2005)

lengths of white rope,[30] designer Danusia Schejbal's set was simple and completely evocative of the centre ring at a circus. The skip was the storage location for all of Feste's various character masks and costume pieces, and subsequently became the box tree Sir Toby, Sir Andrew and Feste (as Fabian) hide in to watch Malvolio read the fake letter from Olivia, as well as the dark house where Malvolio is imprisoned and taunted. The wooden horses were for the soldiers who come to arrest Antonio, and the blue drapes were, according to Visnevski, "like a circus curtain through which all the horses come and so on. [The colour] was the blue sky of Rome for me, because I have an obsession with the deep blue sky of Rome from my childhood…. And from this blue sky, falls the bridegroom out of Chagall, which was Viola. Or our Sebastian."[31]

Figure 18 – Feste (Philip Bretherton) in *Twelfth Night*. (photo: Chris Pearce)

The actors were dealt very challenging parts due to the doubling necessary for only six actors to play all the roles in the play. The actor playing Malvolio also played Valentine and one of the arresting officers, Sir Toby was also Curio, Orsino was Maria, and most remarkably the actress playing Olivia also played Sir Andrew and the actress playing Viola also played her own twin Sebastian. As with *THE TRIAL*, the audience was always surprised when only six actors came onstage for bows. "They seemed to be different sizes, different heights because the spirit was different in each character and the actors responded. I don't know, it was magic,"[32] Visnevski said, and even from a videotape of the production some 15 years later,[33] one can still tell that though Sir Andrew and Olivia are played by the same actor, they appear to be different heights and sizes. The costume design was simple but expressive, and it facilitated the shape-shifting of the actors. Visnevski:

> I wanted each costume to be a historic costume. In other words, to start, the inspiration for it should be historic inspiration, … but in the end, the result of the costume, the shape of the costume, should be the vanity of the character. And … the costumes had to be very easy to change, but that they also had to be completely different, so in other words if a character comes on, the shape would be so different you'd never thought it would be the same actor.[34]

Cherub's production of *Twelfth Night* began with the actor playing Feste dressed as a circus clown with painted face, polka dot pants, and a ringmaster's jacket and top hat, in the center of the circus-ring set, cracking his whip and singing as the five other actors entered. Feste sang and the other characters moved as if in a music box (figure 19).

> **Feste**: When that I was and a little tiny boy,
> With a hey-ho, the wind and the rain;
> A foolish thing was but a toy,
> For the rain it raineth every day.

The song lyrics were taken from the song Shakespeare wrote for Feste to sing at the end of the play, and the music was written by composer Peter Fincham, who composed the music for a string of Cherub productions in the early-1980s (and wrote the script for Cherub's adaptation of Daniel Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*).[†] Fincham's music would underscore the entire production and became such a key element that, according to Visnevski, people would later recall that *Twelfth Night* was a musical. "Of course it isn't a musical," Visnevski said. "There are a few songs in it that Feste sings, it's hardly a musical. On the other hand, there's certain repetition of themes, and so on, each character having his or her own [musical] theme."[35]

Figure 19 – *Twelfth Night* cast: rear, from left, Malvolio (Nicholas Wolff), Feste (Bretherton), Sir Toby (Derek Hutchinson); front, from left, Olivia (Pam Scobie), Viola (Mary Keegan), Orsino (Gary Lilburn). (photo: Chris Pearce)

[†] He shortly thereafter moved into television production, eventually becoming controller of BBC One from 2005-2007 and the current director of television for ITV.

Feste's song transitioned into the first scene, where a Little Lord Fauntleroy-looking Orsino replied, "If music be the food of love, play on," before discussing his love for Olivia with his man Curio. In the next scene, Viola emerged from a tempest created by the actors on stage, dressed in simple white shirt and long, flowing dark blue skirt. Feste played the Captain who saved Viola and who set her up as a man so that she could attend on Duke Orsino. Through the rest of Act I, the other characters were introduced: Maria, Olivia's servant, dressed in typical maid's uniform with womanly padding underneath, evoking the "dame" character in pantomime; Olivia, in pink sparkly gown reminiscent of a fairy princess or ballerina; Sir Toby Belch, Olivia's uncle, looking like Pulcinello out of commedia and resplendent in a red suit, slops and hose, with a large, protruding belly and fluffy white ruff about his neck; Sir Andrew Aguecheek, putative wooer to Olivia, dressed as an Elizabethan country fop, with ruffled knee-length trousers, hose, and an anachronistic vest and large bow tie; Malvolio, Olivia's steward, dressed as a Puritan, in navy blue and white with little adornment; and Viola as her male alter ego Cesario in trousers and a tailcoat (with the tails cut off) with a grey newsboy's cap (figure 20).

The introduction of Sebastian, Viola's twin brother, at the top of Act II occasioned only the simplest costume change to differentiate one twin from the other: the colour of the gloves they wore. Viola (as Cesario) wore green gloves and Sebastian wore blue gloves. The revelation that the two characters were played by the same actress was clearly marked after Sebastian's first scene. Malvolio entered, charged by Olivia to return a ring to Cesario, and Sebastian (with blue gloves) exited past him. Malvolio followed him off, only to return without him, confused. Then Viola (as Cesario) entered,

playing with her green gloves, and "when the audience realized it, they went crazy," Visnevski remembered, "that the actress changed spirit by changing the colour of the gloves, and she was her own twin."[36]

Figure 20 – Viola/Sebastian (Mary Keegan). (photo: Chris Pearce)

The artifice of the production was paramount. In keeping with his assault on "television, small-scale realism" in British acting, Visnevski prevented his performers from "becoming" any of the characters they played. The doubling that Cherub so often required its actors to perform, while necessitated by the need to keep the cast size down, also was a significant stylistic gesture that flew in the face of Stanislavski-inspired realistic acting. Konstantin Stanislavski's techniques and theories prompt performers to develop an individual character who exists within a given set of circumstances. British drama schools have long taught Stanislavski-based acting, and most British actors and

audiences saw (and continue to see) it as the norm, even for Shakespeare. In Cherub's shows, however, each actor played several (usually major) roles, as was the case in *Twelfth Night*. Because they saw the actors perform several characters, the audience could not simply elide actor and character, as usually happens in realism. Hence, the audience was required to rationalize the existence of two characters originating from one actor's body,[‡] for the actor did not disappear into one character, and the doubling made the actor beneath the characters obvious. This prevented the audience from becoming emotionally invested in the characters, because they existed more on the surface of the actor's body (physicality, costume, make-up) rather than coming from the actor's psychology. The result was not perhaps conventionally "deep," but it was fun. As the theatre critic for the Fakenham, Norfolk, newspaper wrote:

> Production and design are about as true to *Twelfth Night* as is, say, *Kiss Me Kate* to *The Taming of the Shrew*. In addition, the director is blithely cavalier in not only editing, but adding to the text. What we are presented with is an unholy plural union between…a Pierrot show of painted clowns, …clockwork dolls from Dr. Coppelius' workshop, to be followed by prodigal echoes of *commedia dell'arte*, closely pursued by a whiff of modern pantomime and stand-up comedy….For premeditated murder of Shakespeare, Cherub are guilty 12 times over, but by common consent are not only reprieved but given the Freedom of Fakenham, for playing of zestful delight, madcap momentum, and terrific energy, and a contagious and wholly unstoppable sense of cherubic fun.[37]

Visnevski's aim was to make theatre theatrical, a recognition that stage work need not replicate what is possible on television or film. With *Twelfth Night*, as with all of his productions, the idea was to engage the audience viscerally, and if that meant sacrificing some of the "established" ways Shakespeare had heretofore been performed, so be it.

[‡] The doubling written into the first act of Caryl Churchill's *Cloud Nine* (1979), produced by alternative theatre company Joint Stock, similarly asked the audience to be attentive to both actor and character by defying conventional type: the black African slave was played by a white man (not in blackface), the son is played by a woman, the wife is played by a man, the daughter is played by a doll. Churchill, in an introductory note, explains that the doubling was prompted by exploring the type of person the character wishes to be in contrast to who he or she really is. (Caryl Churchill, "Cloud Nine," in *Plays: 1* (London: Methuen, 1985), 245.)

And though many of the critics pointed out the divergence, it ultimately didn't impact their reviews. The newspaper critics and the audience loved the show.

The Fakenham critic seemed primed to take Visnevski to task for tinkering with Shakespeare's play, but in reality, very few lines were actually cut, though two scenes were rearranged and lines were added as interludes, some notably from various Shakespeare history plays. These were often inserted to cover moments where actors were frantically changing costume backstage. As the ringmaster, Feste usually took part in these added scenes as all of his costume changes occurred on stage as the simple addition of a mask or costume piece for each character he took on. Visnevski also had Feste indicate the passage of time in these interludes. The first interlude came between scenes three and four of Act I: after Sir Toby and Sir Andrew went off, Feste recounted a famous "bon mot" from the 17th century about man who asks him why he's a fool. "For the same reason you do," Feste said, "you do it for want – of wit; I do it for want – of money." He then announced, "Three days later," and the next scene began. Three months passed between scenes 3 and 4 of Act II, and during the interval, falling between Acts II and III, Feste came into the foyer as the curate (Sir Topas) he would play later in Act IV, scene 2, to torment Malvolio while he was imprisoned. Feste (as curate) rang a bell and recited a portion of Jeremy Collier's infamous antitheatrical tract "Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage." At the end of the interval, back onstage, Feste (as Feste) recalled the tale of the burning of the Globe Theatre.

In addition to these text changes, Visnevski's aim to make his vision of *Twelfth Night* work required some creative blocking, since for the final scene the twins are supposed to appear together on stage for the first time, clearing up all of the mistaken

identities and complications in the plot. Visnevski opted for a perspective shift, requiring that for each character's line, the actress moved from one side of the stage to the other (next to Orsino or next to Olivia) and a stand-in dressed as Viola and wearing a mask, took the non-speaking twin's place (figure 21). As Viola, the actress is spotlighted in gesture with her hand raised with a green glove on it, and she is facing Orsino. Then the lights go out and in the darkness, the actors rearrange themselves and Sebastian raises his other hand in gesture with a blue glove. "That was my *coup de théâtre*," Visnevski said, "that was my most powerful piece of theatre I think I ever did. With total simplicity."[38] The visual impact came second to the rhythm and flow of the scene, as each time a different character talked, the lights would change and the characters would move. While some critics noted this as a problem, others viewed it as a creative solution.

Figure 21 – The final scene; Mary Keegan, the actress who played Viola is at the far left with Orsino (Lilburn). At the far right and holding Olivia's (Eva de Sousa) hand, Sebastian is played by an actor (usually the one who played Sir Toby) in a mask. Feste (Bretherton) is center. (photo: Chris Pearce)

Cherub's *Twelfth Night* opened at Upstream on October 8, 1982 to warm reviews. B. A. Young wrote in the *Financial Times* that "the first five minutes worried me, I confess. A top-hatted ringmaster, Feste, led on five mute characters posing as puppets, and I feared we were in for an exhibition of mime. But no; when the characters came to life, so did the play."[39] It ran in repertory with John Spurling's play *Coming Ashore in Guadaloupe* until December, and from February to May of 1983, it toured to 24 different venues around the UK. The production would eventually become Cherub's longest-running production, as it was picked up for touring by the British Council. Over the next seven years, the production played as part of numerous tours to Europe, Asia and Africa. All the while, despite critical acclaim and the association with numerous RAAs and the British Council, the ACGB still rejected every Cherub request for subsidy.

Re-assessment?

In September of 1982, as he was rehearsing *Twelfth Night*, Visnevski wrote to Faulkner at the ACGB and asked for a re-appraisal of Cherub's work. In the previous 12 months, Visnevski wrote, the company had done "112 performances at 46 different venues, with two new productions and four revivals; British Council tours to Holland and Belgium; represent[ed] British theatre at the Liege and Tel Aviv Festivals; [and made] a film about Michel de Ghelderode" all without the ACGB's support. He lists a wide number of supporters at various theatres and RAAs around the country as well as at the British Council, and indicates that the company's domestic and international tours had been well-received by audiences. The company had, in spite of its tenuous financial situation, managed to achieve a good standard of performance, largely "due to the

sympathetic concern of those connected with the company … who are prepared to spend their own money to help keep the Company afloat." He continued:

> The type of theatre we as a Company [are] trying to create is surely a very subjective matter, and [the] interpretation of art should be allowed freedom of expression. What makes any company "special" is having an individual style, a policy and a reputation for good work, and it is this that differentiates it from the many other companies with which it is in competition. We think Cherub has succeeded in doing this, and it is for that reason that we seek – and consider we deserve – reappraisal. It is of course entirely understandable that individual Officers should not necessarily like our style of approach to a particular play, or agree with the choice of repertoire, but in view of the reputation we have gained during the four years of the Company's operation for quality, cost-effectiveness and identifiable demand for the work, I would ask that the Drama Panel might be prepared to take into consideration a wider range of professional opinions…[40]

It was essentially the same argument that Stephen Boyce from Southern Arts had made a few weeks earlier: the ACGB is too focused on its own "expert" opinions when assessing companies, and that Faulkner and his staff should consider supporting artists who have proven that they can consistently produce, achieve audiences and manage lengthy tours. To this letter, Visnevski received no response, and it was not until another volley of missives back and forth that Faulkner would see fit to answer the call for a reassessment.

The question of re-assessment likely emerged because, as Visnevski noted in his letter, Cherub's touring programme with the British Council was picking up speed. One of the primary contradictions in Cherub's history was that the Arts Council did not give the company funding to work inside the UK, though the British Council was happy to send them to "promote British arts abroad." As Sinclair notes, the BC had been created in the mid-1930s "to promote abroad a wider appreciation of British culture and civilization."[41] Certainly part of Britain's imperial project, and an earlier attempt to "Raise and Spread," the BC sent British artists overseas to showcase the best work from the center. Many of the same attitudes towards Art that the ACGB came to develop can

be connected to the BC, and its specified mission was, in part, to encourage "the study and use of the English language, and thereby, to extend a knowledge of British literature and of the British contributions to music and the fine arts, the sciences, philosophic thought and political practice."[42] And, yet, secondary to this mission was the idea that the BC should work to make connections between Britain and other countries, and "to assist the free flow of students from overseas to British seats of learning, … and of United Kingdom students in the reverse direction." While exchange was part of the BC's mandate, this did not extend to bringing foreign artists into the UK; as Peter Hall, artistic director of the National Theatre, said, "The British Council exists to promote British arts abroad; the Arts Council exists to promote British arts at home; but nobody exists to promote foreign art in Britain."[43] Even so, the fact that exchange, and not just dissemination, was at all involved in the BC's work meant that it was much more amenable to difference than the ACGB.

The BC sent Cherub overseas eight different times between 1981 and 1989, and thus their selection by the BC cannot be seen as a fluke (unlike the funding of *Chaste Maid* by the ACGB) because it was not a one-time occurrence. This included tours of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* to Bern, Switzerland, in June 1981; *Kafka's THE TRIAL* to the Netherlands in October 1981 and to Belgium in February 1982; and tours of *Twelfth Night* to Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands in January 1984; to Egypt in November 1984; Spain in September 1987; to Iraq and Pakistan in late 1988; and to Ethiopia, Sudan, and Zimbabwe, in Spring 1989. A more complete accounting of Cherub's *Twelfth Night* tours with the British Council will be taken up shortly, but I note it here because it's a key reason why Cherub was so keen for the ACGB to reconsider its opinions.

Faulkner's reply to Visnevski's request for reappraisal finally came in January of 1983. This followed a series of letters back and forth between Cherub and the ACGB which seemed to raise hackles on both sides. Clearly peeved, Faulkner begins his January letter by saying that he is replying to the questions in Visnevski's September letter, saying his previous silence on the subject was "an oversight which I am now rectifying."[44] Faulkner goes on to tackle a few of the ongoing issues that had emerged since September, and then addresses the reassessment question. "I should stress it is not a question of 're-assessment,'" Faulkner wrote, "but of a continuous process which covers Cherub alongside a large number of other project companies." He went on:

> Let me sum up the assessment of Cherub to date: since November 1979 the Council has been able to see 12 different productions on 36 separate occasions; the assessment has been provided by eight officers, nine advisers and one Council member. … Quite extraordinary attention has been paid to the work of Cherub and I cannot therefore agree that you have been unfairly treated.[45]

Once again, Faulkner avoids the issue of specific criticisms and says more generally that those members of the ACGB who have seen Cherub's shows have not liked them.

The specific reports tell a slightly different story, as they did back in 1981. I have found only 24 reports from this period, not the 36 Faulkner refers to,[§] and of these, 12 are mixed or positive and 12 are negative. Many of these reports indicate the response of the audience, which was, in almost all cases, positive. Though the standard ACGB line on Cherub seemed to be that they were (and would remain) unworthy of subsidy, a new sense of doubt also began to creep into the reports: a sense that though a firm decision

[§] Immediately prior to his letter, Cherub had opened a production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* and several reports were generated. Though I am not counting them in my assessment because their dating puts them after Faulkner's letter, Faulkner may be counting the advisors' and officers' views on *Cyrano* as he writes his letter. More digging in the ACGB archive is necessary to verify the existence of the remainder of the reports Faulkner mentions. Some of these reports may have been verbal ones from meetings, and I have not yet viewed the Drama Advisory Panel's or the Council's minutes to see what might be contained there.

had been laid down about the company, some officers and advisers were having second thoughts. One drama officer, listed only as "AMcK" noted that, "I was of course anxious to put to the back of my mind the discussions I had heard in Projects Committee about Cherub, but I found it difficult to do so." He goes on to give a somewhat mixed review of the production of *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, and then summed up by writing:

> I find I am no nearer an answer to the question: "should this company be subsidized by us?" This is precisely the kind of theatre I do not like. … BUT lots of people think otherwise. They had houses of 600 at Leeds, I was told. Is it possible that the demand for this work is so great that the company's style and standard is *disregarded* by its audiences?[46]

This report is especially revealing, because for the first time, an ACGB drama officer intimates that there might be something they aren't seeing in Cherub's work, though AMcK attempts to rationalize this by saying that the audience must be "disregarding" the problems otherwise apparent with the company's "style and standard." He does not consider that his (and the other ACGB's reporters) expectations for style and standard might not jibe with that of the audiences or critics who admired Cherub's work. Other reports from both drama officers and other members of the drama advisory panel indicate a similar wish to rationalize the decision not to fund Cherub. Nicholas Barter, a drama adviser and later the Principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, wrote that perhaps it wasn't Visnevski's fault and that "I'd like to see him working with better actors,"[47] a somewhat ridiculous expectation because without subsidy, Cherub could not afford to pay "better" actors. Of course, Cherub's eschewing of conventional realistic acting would have made difficult any Stanislavski-inspired evaluation of the acting in its productions. Cherub's actors likely seemed "bad" because they were not utilizing the realistic acting techniques that the ACGB expected to see.

Another adviser, John Bond, writes that "I'd like to see more of the company's work. They still seem to be searching for the right play."[48] Bond perhaps was unaware that Cherub had already created 12 different productions. Adviser Mike Alfreds notes that Visnevski "should probably be encouraged to go and study somewhere and direct a year of realistic plays!"[49] And John Bowen wrote the same (though since they both admit to attending the same performance of *Journal of the Plague Year* in their reviews, perhaps they discussed this): "he hasn't the experience or the knowledge to function as the artistic director of a company; it all ends up like a show by students. He has a strong visual sense, might develop into a most interesting director, but needs to work as a subordinate for a while."[50] Visnevski had previously worked as an assistant director under Frank Dunlop at the Young Vic.

The reports note that if Visnevski (and by extension Cherub) could be made to conform to a specific standard – to be re-molded – it would likely yield a "better" product. Exactly how the company should be remade and who would be responsible for doing so was a moot point, because the ACGB didn't see the effort at reforming Cherub worthwhile. Indeed, in a different review, Alfreds wrote:

> This is my fourth Cherub show. Alas, things don't improve down at Waterloo. It's too bad that Visnevski hasn't been told why he hasn't so far been funded (not that he'd be likely to act on the criticism I suppose[**]) but as things are he seems to be going further and further in the ghastly directions he's set upon and compounding his 'crimes.'[51]

Alfreds, the founder of Shared Experience, an alternative company which created very physical adaptations of classic works of literature, was someone the ACGB's

[**] In 1985, Visnevski sought the advice of Barbara Todd, drama officer at the British Council, to see if the BC would pay for Visnevski to travel to France to observe the rehearsals of a noted director. Visnevski's short list included Patrice Chereau, Georgio Strehler and Ariane Mnouchkine, none of whom would have been considered conventional directors by the ACGB's standards.

confidentiality policy was written for. He panned all of the Cherub productions he reviewed for the ACGB. The ACGB's practice of recruiting people (from companies who were likely to be competing over the same money pot) to offer artistic opinions on the work of their rivals had long been commonplace; whether or not it was fair is an open question. The practice does tend to reaffirm the idea that the ACGB's artistic funding practices really only brought about the replication of its own standards for theatre. The suggestion made by these advisers that Visnevski was "not ready" to fulfill the leadership role in a company was almost certainly based upon their own experience and trajectory in the cultural field. They could not understand someone who wished to do it differently.

Of course, not all of what the drama officers and advisers wrote was negative; at least 12 reports in this period found elements of Cherub's shows to praise, and even some of the overtly negative reports grudgingly acknowledged things they liked about the shows. These opinions were always tempered, though, by saying that the company "did not yet meet their standards," whatever those standards were. When the standards were not met, the company was left to founder. Sinclair notes that the ACGB often took this approach and he quotes Faulkner comparing arts funding to war: "It was [like a field dressing-station] a bloody business. Sometimes we had to apply triage – who to send back to the front, who to nurse and revive, who to let die."[52] The ACGB had decided Cherub was not worth saving.

However, Cherub was still asking its audiences to write to the ACGB, hoping for a change of opinion. Eventually, since Cherub's efforts had thus far come to naught, the head of the British Council's Drama and Dance Department, Robert Sykes, decided to write his own letter in support of Cherub in March 1983. Faulkner had since left the

ACGB, and Sykes addressed his letter to the Acting Drama Director, Dennis Andrews. Writing that he wanted to "take an opportunity of noting formally a British Council view of this Company's value," Sykes writes that he is aware of Cherub's situation because of copies of letters Visnevski had forwarded to him and through his membership on the ACGB's drama advisory panel. He writes of a forthcoming Cherub tour, and that "we can only use overseas such performing arts companies as are adequately funded – whether by public subsidy of one sort or another, or their own efforts." He details Cherub's history with the BC, complimenting the company for both its efficiency and its quality. Further, he writes, "since overseas tours cost us an increasing amount of money, the existence of smallish companies of high quality with a special stamp of artistic quality is something we greatly welcome. … Sometimes [Cherub] may shock the systems of a conventional theatre going public, but has a proven track-record of communication with the minds of young audiences." Sykes also admires the company's effort to perform "neglected classics" because "their concentration on a historical literary heritage is something we see as worthwhile." He goes on to further detail Cherub's financial plight should they continue to receive no subsidy from the ACGB and offers reports by BC officers detailing the successful tours Cherub had recently completed. He concludes by saying:

> In view of the British Council's association with Cherub Company's overseas visits, I think it is probable that my staff have a rather closer contact with the development of its work than other Advisers or Assessors. If, in the course of looking at future applications from Andrew Visnevski for Arts Council support you wished to get an opinion from any of us, we would be very happy to help.[53]

In a remarkable moment, one government agency in support of British arts (the one sending artists abroad) was defending a company who had been derided by another

(the one supporting artists at home). Further, the BC was offering its own assessment criteria as a basis for an ACGB reassessment. Cherub had become a useful commodity for the BC, one that they wished to continue sending abroad to promote British culture. The company, as Sykes noted, offered a good value for the BC's money: inexpensive to tour, but artistically interesting. Sykes' letter seems to have had little impact, for the ACGB continued to defend its position and did not take Sykes up on his offer. Andrews replied to Sykes by repeating Faulkner's line that "greater than average consideration has been given to Cherub." He indicated that the ACGB *had* taken into consideration outside views—supposedly the very views which the ACGB had been constantly assailed by various letter writers for ignoring—and that these outside views are the only reason why Cherub is so heavily scrutinized, "since I have to add," he writes, "that the main burden of *our* reports has not and does not recommend support for the company."[54] In other words, Andrews was saying, we don't care what anyone else thinks. The ACGB was sticking with its own assessment of the company.

Cherub's campaign continued, and numerous letters in the ACGB's files indicate that they both received and replied to the statements of support sent in by Cherub's audiences. In June of 1984, Andrews wrote to Visnevski to once again reiterate "that Cherub has had the most thorough assessment yet given to a drama project applicant." Further, he wrote, "given the weight of such careful treatment, no amount of public campaigning can be other than a sad dissipation of energies and resources." The ACGB was washing its hands of Cherub: "since the Council's response to future applications from Cherub is unlikely to change with a substantive change in the company's own work, I should warn you that the Council may not feel able to continue to acknowledge letters

from the public."[55] Visnevski's response was indignant: "we consider it a perfectly legitimate way of drawing the attention of our audiences to our financial situation," he wrote on June 15, 1984. He did not hesitate in saying that, despite the ACGB's desire to ignore the letters sent from the audience, "I do hope, however, that they [the audience] will continue to care sufficiently about Cherub's work and survival to write."[56]

Franchising Cherub Abroad

In contrast to the trenchant ACGB opinion of Cherub, the British Council found Cherub exciting and was happy to fund its tours abroad. Cherub makes a decisive but necessary shift toward international touring in the mid-1980s as the possibility of receiving subsidy from the ACGB slimmed, and the BC welcomed them with open arms. Though Cherub produced seven new productions between 1982 and 1986, including *Cyrano de Bergerac* (1983), *Hamlet* (1983), *As You Like It* (1984) and an ambitious production of *Kafka's THE CASTLE* (1985), most of these productions had limited runs at a single London theatre. *Hamlet* was the only one to go on an extended national tour, from April to June of 1984, and *As You Like it* and *THE CASTLE* had only brief tours after opening at the Edinburgh Festival and then playing in London for short runs.

Meanwhile, their international presence increased. Cherub went abroad twice in 1984 with *Twelfth Night* under the BC's aegis, and once in 1985 with *As You Like It*. From 1986 to 1989, the company produced only one new production in the UK, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1989), and worked with a composer to turn *THE TRIAL* into a chamber opera in 1986. In the same period, they went overseas on major BC tours in 1987, 1988 and 1989, touring *Twelfth Night* and producing Alan Bennett's *The Old Country* as part

of the package for the Pakistan tour. By 1989, an article on the Edinburgh Fringe in the *Independent* dubbed them "cultural ambassadors,"[57] a phrase picked up for an article on the company in *Direct*, the journal of the British Director's Guild, [58] and one the company would use in much of its subsequent publicity. The cultural field around Cherub shifted in the 1980s as alternative companies were forced to professionalize by both shifting trends in theatre as well as new ACGB policies. "While in 'the old days' of 1979 the amateur ethos held sway," wrote Emma Crichton-Miller for the 1989 article in the *Independent*, "by 1981 [Fringe] companies were already spending more and more on lighting and sets, and Cherub couldn't compete."[59] Of course, those companies were able to afford to upgrade their technology with help from the ACGB and, increasingly, corporate sponsors. Cherub could count on neither.

In these few years, *Twelfth Night* was nearly the only production that Cherub had going. And because the tours were intermittent, different actors came and went in the production. The British Council, being familiar with the show and using it specifically to attract interest in other countries, expected that Visnevski and his company would maintain the quality of the show. Actor Anthony Best, who was a later replacement for the role of Sir Toby Belch, remembered that it "was difficult to rehearse, because it was quite formulaic … when we were being put into it. I think there was one original [cast] member [for these tours]. And time was against us, so to a certain extent you had to accept [that] it was like, 'yes, do this, go there.' It was very choreographed, from that point of view."[60] In its way, Cherub had found a way to sustain itself, but it had done so by turning away from the collaborative method it discovered with *THE TRIAL*. It had essentially franchised its product, which had tremendous impact on the company's

reputation and work in subsequent years.

Jonathan Burston, writing on the development of "megamusicals" like *Phantom of the Opera* or *Les Miserables*, notes that

> Procedures for remounting megamusicals owed more to Fordist logics of the production line than to the craft-based models of reproduction that had preceded them. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and into the new century, actors, musicians and others working on megamusicals have complained of new restrictions on their creative autonomy as new tiers of globe-trotting artistic staff 'directed' performers on matters pertaining to blocking, gesture and interpretation with new and profoundly alienating levels of precision."[61]

Cherub's reach never equaled that of *Phantom* or any television or film property, but it still franchised itself in order to stay alive. It, in effect, sold one of its most successful properties and replicated that property in different contexts in exchange for payment. I do not go so far as to say that the company "sold out," but as Joan Littlewood discovered after many of her successful productions transferred to West End theatres, while the money was necessary for the company's survival, those productions tended to dominate all of the company's other work. In Littlewood's case, her core actors were working on the West End and were unavailable to work on new productions; in Cherub's case, it basically could not mount any new productions because all of their limited time and resources were dedicated to the touring of one production. Indeed, once the luster wore off of *Twelfth Night* after the African tour in 1989, the company very briefly mounted a production of *The Duchess of Malfi* before taking an extended hiatus.

However, the British Council was not just using Cherub, and Cherub certainly did benefit from international touring. In a way, the BC and Cherub were perfect partners, and the relationship was somewhat symbiotic. In the introduction to her history of the BC, Frances Donaldson writes that "ninety-nine out of every hundred of [the BC's] own

countrymen have never heard of it, while, of those who have, very few have a clear idea of what it stands for."[62] Indeed, unlike the work of the ACGB, most of the British Council's work was and continues to be done abroad. The BC faced a particularly brutal round of cuts between 1979 and 1983, resulting in a reduction of its budget from £46.5 million in 1979 to £38 million pounds for 1983-84, though many in Thatcher's government had been advocating a decrease to £33 million pounds or less. The Director-General of the BC, John Burgh, in a speech, attributed the zeal for cuts to the lack of knowledge within Britain about the Council's work abroad, and he called on his colleagues at the Council to work with him to "remedy this situation."[63]

In the midst of a budget crisis, small companies with efficiently packaged shows were attractive to the BC. In 1987, after Cherub returned from Spain, the BC was again considering Cherub's *Twelfth Night* for an overseas tour, and the BC's representative in Jordan was attempting to arrange a visit for the company. For many reasons, both political and practical, the tour didn't occur, but Paul J. Smith of the BC's Dance and Drama Department continued to promote the show to other countries. In a letter to the BC representative in Iraq, Peter Elborn, Smith recommended Cherub for a tour. In his memo, after discarding other companies "for reasons of unavailability, inappropriateness of production, or unbearable cost," he wrote:

> [Cherub's] production of *Twelfth Night* is one I would recommend….The production has a bright, visual impact enlivened by an attractive musical score. It is inventive without being particularly bizarre or esoteric and its inventiveness is not…of a kind which would offend any Iraqi cultural taboos….Cherub may not be cheap but you won't find cheaper. Their costings are very economical."[64]

Elsewhere in the memo, Smith praised the company's work ethic, described them as being very "devoted to the Council" as well as flexible and understanding of working in

difficult conditions. Cherub was a useful commodity: its productions allowed the BC, for comparatively less money, to send what the BC considered a quality production overseas for the edification of foreign nationals and overseas corporate sponsors. Further, Cherub's "visual" approach bridged the language gap and thus could be sent to non-English speaking countries. As Sir Kenneth Cork noted in his report to the ACGB in 1985, the British Council found visual theatre "crucially successful in the overseas presentation of British theatre both because of its non-verbal form and its high international quality."[65] Unlike the ACGB, the BC found value in almost everything that comprised Cherub's ethos: small, efficient, visual, inventive. And, of course, relatively inexpensive.

Elborn would agree to coordinate the Cherub tour to Iraq, and over time, the tour widened to include a visit to Pakistan. The motivation for the BC to send a company into Iraq at this time was as much political as it was economic: the British had historic ties with Iraq, having taken control of much of the Middle East region (under the names Mesopotamia and Palestine) after World War I. Iraq became independent of Britain in 1932, though the UK maintained a presence in the region. Between 1980-1988, under Saddam Hussein, Iraq and Iran fought a particularly bloody war, with claims of genocide and the murder of civilians on both sides. In Iraq, Hussein's government also was dealing with an insurrection of the Kurdish region in the north around the city of Mosul, and in the struggle, significant acts of genocide were committed against the Iraqi Kurds. Much of the fighting in both areas was scaling down in 1987, and a ceasefire with Iran was declared in 1988.

Cherub's crews would become, as several memos in the British Council's archive

note, some of the first Westerners to go into Basra and Mosul following the end of the conflict. As he was arranging the tour, Elborn telexed Smith about the condition of the theatre in Basra that "lighting and other technical requirements [are] OK but theatre slightly damaged by war. … Hope company will accept difficult conditions and find compensation in being first foreign arts event in Basra following ceasefire."[66] Where Cherub had seen itself as pioneering a particular type of theatre within Britain and been rejected by the ACGB, they were now being sent into war zones to showcase their style of theatre as representatives of Britain. As company administrator Vi Marriott wrote in her report on the tour, "Basra was very exciting for the company….People called out 'welcome' to us from taxis and in the street, and the local newsagent refused to take money for postcards." In the bombed-out theatre, the company found that repairs had been made as well as possible, and a temporary dressing room had been set up that Marriott declared "the best backstage accommodation we had on the tour."[67]

To fund the tour, the BC coordinated with corporate sponsors in the receiving countries as part of the work of developing ties (cultural, political and economic) between Britain and countries abroad. For Marriott and the company, this often meant that they were playing to houses of "VIP business associates and ex-pats" rather than to much of the local population. The parties that each sponsor wanted to host to show off the company to their associates and employees also tended to dominate, as Marriott reported:

> Because there were three sponsors plus the British Council and sometimes the Ambassador as well, the schedule became alarmingly tight. Receptions were arranged for the early evening on set-up and get-in days, which meant only some of the company could go….A representative selection of the company always attended, but we felt it was a disappointment to the organizers not to have everybody.[68]

In both Iraq and Pakistan, the company was also invited to attend performances at the

local theatres: in Baghdad they saw a version of *The Tempest* in Arabic, and in Karachi they saw *The House of Bernarda Alba* performed in Urdu by the local puppet theatre.

In every sense, Cherub was serving as cultural ambassadors. The corporate sponsors did see fit to arrange matinees for school audiences, and in Iraq, the company did several workshops with school groups. The performances and interactions with local people were some of the most rewarding experiences for the actors on the tour. As Anthony Best, who played Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*, remembered:

> Women under Saddam's regime, they did okay; they liked Saddam because they could have equal status and work and didn't need to wear the veil. Anyway, Viola comes on and says, the only way to get along in the world is I have to take this dress off and become a man, thereby I will have a chance maybe to survive and find my brother, and that is what I will have to do; that is the option. She sees that as the option open to her at this point. And in the next scene she walks on as a man. Well, all the girls just got up and cheered really loudly in Arabic; we were completely surprised by that. They thought, this for them was a victory, it was a great affirmation of who they were, of what wanted to be in the world. It gave you great hope…[69]

Both Best and fellow actor Anthony Wise, who played Orsino and Maria, remembered that the actors were not always the best representatives, at least not in the minds of their handlers. Though constantly warned not to do certain things (including take pictures), Best remembered that "when you got there, there were only a couple of things that you had to be careful about [doing]." He has several albums of photographs from his time in Iraq and Pakistan on tour with Cherub. In Iraq both actors remembered coming into the theatre in Mosul and seeing a huge, framed portrait of Saddam Hussein on the stage. "We thought, oh, we have got to get rid of that," Wise remembered.[70] Best added:

> nobody in the theater would move the portrait because if they did they would be shot, or at least [have] serious threat to their lives; not just them, but their families. So there was no way they were going to do it. I thought, we can't have

> this portrait. Tony and I, because we just like a giggle, we looked at each other and said we will do it. So we moved Saddam's portrait right to the back of the stage and we turned it around so that Saddam's face was facing the brick wall. When we achieved this, we heard in the stalls – the theater looked empty in the darkness – we heard laughing like "hehehehe, hehehe." Anyone running Iraq, they got Egyptian workers in really cheaply. So the Egyptian staff were laughing because, we were laughing at Saddam, and they were laughing with us. So that was a nice moment.[71]

Pakistan was also somewhat politically unstable, and the company was in the country during the first election of Benazir Bhutto as prime minster. "There were all sorts of supporters or trucks going around and people with flags going, 'Benazir Bhutto!'" Best remembered. "We were kind of waving out of the window. And Andrew was furious with us …he wanted us to be on our best behavior…Because we were going, 'Benazir BhuttO! BhuttO!'"

After the successful Asian tour in 1988, the BC again sent Cherub overseas, this time to Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe in 1989, countries which were no less politically tense than Iraq and Pakistan had been. As Marriott recalled in an issue of *Traveller* magazine, "two of these countries were in a state of civil war, and it was perhaps appropriate that we should start off with a bomb scare at Heathrow on the night of our departure."[72] They performed first in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, but did not tour the country because it was considered too dangerous to go beyond the capital. Next, they flew to Khartoum in Sudan, where they played one show at the Sudan Club, for expatriates, and several more performances at a local theatre. They flew back through Addis Ababa and were delayed at length in the airport due to an attempted coup which closed the airport and brought out the Ethiopian military. Eventually, they made their way to Zimbabwe, where they were permitted to travel more widely and to perform in not just the capital, Harare, but also in Gweru and Masvingo.

The pre-tour publicity in the various countries surely made Cherub's visit seem an important cultural event for those who would be able to see it. In the *Herald* in Harare, Zimbabwe, Ian Hoskins wrote that "the chances are that tickets for the second evening performance will be at a premium." He continued by profiling the "impressive six-person cast of highly seasoned professionals" who were featured in *Twelfth Night.*[73] In Karachi, Pakistan, the *Morning News* described Cherub as having "an ongoing reputation as a leading medium-scale company specializing in lively productions of the classics."[74] Overseas, the parerga around their foreign performances remade Cherub into something it was not acknowledged to be in the UK: an important company of substantial skill and reputation. While this narrative certainly suited Cherub, it also suited the BC and its corporate sponsors, and nothing printed was untrue or over-inflated. Unlike at Cherub's shows in the UK where the audience was made aware of the company's financial plight, the audiences abroad entered some rather grand theatres with the expectation of seeing an important international company. In essence, the audience was being told that they could like Cherub and appreciate it for what it produced. For the company, that was certainly a refreshing change from the UK.

Further, the international touring allowed Cherub to genealogically widen its influence. In all three countries, in addition to the performances of *Twelfth Night*, the actors and crew did workshops with local students. The company, as ambassadors, had to confront the expectations of the local populations head on. At one drama school, Best remembered that the students and staff "were really embarrassed in this rehearsal room because it is all falling apart and the wind comes through the window and all this kind of thing. I said, we have to rehearse like that in London; the rain gets through the roof.

They were really surprised by that." In Sudan, which dealt with ethnic and religious divisions and civil war between north and south for decades before eventually splitting into two countries in 2011, Wise remembered visiting a local hospital. "All these southern Sudanese would come with these terrible diseases to the only place they could get," he said. "And they came up walking through the desert to these hospitals, and I felt the most useless ever because they thought we were doctors, and what we were were actors." Marriott recalled a visit to a refugee camp in Sudan where the company played with the children and wished they could perform the show for them, "they would have loved the color and the sound and the movement."[75] In general, though, Best remembers the engagement with the African audiences as a positive experience:

> What I think surprised Africans was, here was a group of white people being silly in the play. Shakespeare has silly scenes….It is the fun of it, and that we did it in a fun way. And hopefully fun in our delivery of it. For them it was highly unusual for them to see, as we realized, white people having laughs and being stupid; especially men. Men putting on makeup, jumping about, hooting about; this was in deeply conservative African society. … but then you kind of felt that for them to see Europeans laughing about and being stupid and singing songs, you felt that [they thought] yeah, we could be African too. That was heartening.

I asked Best if he felt that the company had been "used" by the British Council. He replied, "I think sometimes they felt that they had something innocuous they could use as a platform, and I think they were quite surprised that we weren't innocuous; we were asking quite pertinent questions." The actors' occasional resistance to following the rules laid down for them was evidence of this. "We have got to act our ideas and feelings and opinions, which were also opinion-changing," Best said, "and we feel that as actors we have a platform to do that, as well as engaging the public in our own way." He also stressed to me that though *Twelfth Night*, as a comedy, was not generally considered to be especially "political," Cherub's was by no means a neutral production, and audiences in

all of the various countries in which they performed were able to receive the play in their own way. "The story is certainly not innocuous," he told me. "Very quickly you are into quite confrontational issues and ideas that are on stage." Above all, he stressed, the tours were worth it for the mutual education the actors and audiences received from each other. "In Africa, the greatest resource that country has got are the people in it. And that was everywhere you went."

Perils of Professionalization

In his introduction to *Dreams and Deconstructions*, Sandy Craig writes, "the challenge for alternative theatre has been and is, continually, to set a course between the Scylla and Charybdis of incorporation into the mainstream and cultural ghettoization."[76] Cherub had been facing this challenge since its inception, and because Visnevski did not know what the ACGB disliked about his productions, he was relatively free to continue producing theatre his way, essentially getting himself into rougher waters with the ACGB. If there is any positive to Cherub's not receiving subsidy, is that the company's productions were likely less influenced by critical naysaying, and the company was reasonably free from any inducement to adapt its work for the mainstream. The small theatres Cherub was working in were happy to have the company perform its work as Visnevski created it; had the company been partnering with larger regional theatres or with the West End or national companies, inevitably Visnevski's style would have been modified. The Council easily "ghettoized" Cherub by christening it "bad" and not giving it subsidy, ensuring it would not enter the mainstream. The impact that had on the company was significant, but they did not do themselves any favors in the ACGB's mind

by biting the hand that had refused, but could potentially, feed them.

The imprimatur of the ACGB's stamp of approval was understood by other funders. In a rejection letter, the ACGB recommended that Cherub seek other sponsorship, but the reality was that ACGB funding was often seen by corporate sponsors as a marker for the companies they should support as well. Cherub attempted to seek corporate sponsorship for their productions; numerous rejection letters exist in their archived files. Unlike the ACGB and the BC, most corporate sponsors didn't send out agents to view the productions of those who applied for sponsorship. They relied upon the application itself, and on reviews and word of mouth about the company. Clearly, without any money, Cherub's applications must have paled in comparison to those of other companies. The situation compounded itself; no funding and a bad relationship with the ACGB caused Cherub to be excluded. Worse, newer companies were now practicing similarly to Cherub, and were being rewarded by the ACGB for it. Kate Dorney writes that the Cork Report, a major ACGB report which examined arts subsidy practices in the regional theatres, cited "the work of Trickster and Trestle in producing mime which 'escaped from the hidebound forms of white-face mime and explored a vital theatricality which made use of sound and sound effects, masks, commedia techniques and humour.'" Those were all hallmarks of Cherub productions. The inclusion of this description in the Cork Report, Dorney writes, "was followed by the adoption of Trestle, David Glass Mime and Complicité as Drama clients."[77] Unlike these companies, Cherub received no ACGB funding after 1981.

The drama officer's reports and correspondence reveal much about how the ACGB understood Cherub's work and about why it never gave Cherub funding, but also

raise many questions about the specific measures the ACGB used to evaluate artists. Only once in the correspondence in the Cherub and ACGB archives have I found a passage from the ACGB that tries to explain to Cherub why they were disliked by the ACGB's officers and advisors. Newly-installed Drama Director Dickon Reed wrote to Visnevski in July 1983 and told him that the Committee felt "that elements of the productions tended to distort rather than enhance the plays and forced rather contrived interpretations upon them."[78] That is probably the most specific piece of feedback Visnevski ever received from anyone at the ACGB. This lack of feedback demonstrates the symbolic violence in Faulkner's philosophy of triage, and Cherub was clearly a company the ACGB was happy to let die.

One of the main dangers of Cherub, in the view of those that despised their work, was that the company was too radical. "He rattled their cages," Anthony Best told me, "which I think it is good that he did that." The difference between the theatre critics and the reviewers from the ACGB is that because the latter's judgments were secret, the Council's staff never had to worry about whether anyone else agreed with their opinions. Their criticism was not subject to review, yet who they gave money to was solely based on these judgments. Surely, if they tried to cut off funding to the RSC or NT, there would be hell to pay in the form of widespread protest and likely parliamentary intervention. But ignoring small-scale companies and individuals like Cherub had no downside; those companies could never create a sufficient level of controversy, though Cherub, for one, had tried. Generally, if the ACGB didn't find something worthy, then everyone assumed that it wasn't worthy. No appeals were possible, and no one imposed any checks or balance.

Companies found it increasingly complex to produce theatre in the cultural field of Britain in the 1980s, especially as competing agendas both within and without the government, the ACGB, and the BC led to increasingly limited funding, and significantly affected what a company was expected to produce. The national companies were in dire straits as well, though with less justification given their subsidies. The problem was, in the wake of the *Glory of the Garden* report on regional funding, that the ACGB was increasingly having to reduce the amount of subsidy given to the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company to cover the increased amount mandated to be given to other companies, especially those in the regions. Devolution had begun, and would trigger significant changes in arts funding through the 1990s. In the '80s, Peter Hall, who obviously was sympathetic with the "Raise and Spread" approach, complained, "if an actor in Wrexham rep cannot afford a pair of new tights, it is all the fault of Hall and his sybaritic cronies who spend their days lolling on beds of down, puffing on opium pipes and making bonfires of public money."[79] Hall used his public platform to agitate against the cuts and announced, in 1985, that a lack of funds demanded he close one of the National's three theatres – the Cottesloe – in order to reduce costs. He led a protest against the changes the ACGB was making due to the influence of Thatcher's government, and induced 47 artistic directors of subsidized theatres to vote "no confidence" in the ACGB.[80]

Because of the National's perceived importance, Hall was able to secure funding from other sources to re-open the Cottesloe and to continue running the National. Cherub had no such opportunity. It did not receive any of the money being diverted from the national companies, and its ACGB-directed status as *persona non grata* did not help it to

secure funds from other sources. In addition to being economic capital, subsidy affords a measure of symbolic capital as well. When one agency deems a company worthy, others often follow suit. A subsidized company can reasonably expect to be strongly considered by private and corporate foundations for additional funds. Cherub was not subsidized, and the support from the British Council was not enough to gain them funding from other sources. Visnevski had been trying to walk the line between his own artistic principles and the ones that he perceived the Arts Council was seeking to place on his productions. That he was unsuccessful was largely dependent upon the ACGB's unwavering view of his company.

Notes

[1] "Fraying the Fringe," unpublished manuscript, c1984, Cherub Archive, 49.

[2] Brown, "Road Through Woodstock," 224. (see chap. I, note 19)

[3] Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, 49. (see chap. I, note 12)

[4] Visnevski, interview, December 12, 2010.

[5] Undated program insert, circa 1981, Cherub Archive.

[6] John Faulkner, letter to Andrew Visnevski, July 9, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[7] Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, 114. (see chap. I, note 11)

[8] Jacques Derrida and Craig Owens, "The Parergon," *October* 9 (Summer 1979), 26.

[9] Rebellato, *1956 and All That*, 114.

[10] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 12, 2010.

[11] Sara Freeman, "Towards a Genealogy and Taxonomy of British Alternative Theatre," *New Theatre Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (November 2006), 366-67.

[12] Andrew Visnevski, letter to John Faulkner, July 15, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[13] Joyce Cheeseman, "Report on Cherub Theatre Company Seen at Buxton 5 August 1981," August 18, 1981, ACGB Archive, V&A Theatre and Performance Archives, London, UK.

[14] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Andrew Visnevski, Sept. 9, 1981, Cherub Archive.

[15] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 74-5. (see chap. 1, note 6)

[16] Ibid, 273.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Stephen Boyce, letter to Jonathan Lamede, April 8, 1982, ACGB Archive.

[19] Jonathan Lamede, letter to Stephen Boyce, May 5, 1982, ACGB Archive.

[20] Stephen Boyce, letter to Jonathan Lamede, May 12, 1982, ACGB Archive.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures,* 149.

[23] Ibid, 214.

[24] Ibid, 226.

[25] Andrew Visnevski, letter to Richard Delmarco, January 22, 1982, Cherub Archive.

[26] Andrew Visnevski, email message to author, March 9, 2012.

[27] Visnevski, interview, August 17, 2005.

[28] Samuel Leiter, ed., *Shakespeare Around the Globe: A Guide to Notable Postwar Revivals* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 771.

[29] Visnevski, interview, 17 August 2005.

[30] Set check list for Cherub tour to Spain, 1987, Cherub Archive.

[31] Visnevski, interview, 17 August 2005.

[32] Ibid.

[33] *Cherub Company presents Twelfth Night*, recorded theatrical performance, (1989, Harare, Zimbabwe, British Council), videotape.

[34] Visnevski, interview, 17 August 2005.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] C.V.R., "Delightful Murder of the Bard," review of *Twelfth Night* by Cherub Company, unsourced review from Fakenham, Norfolk, performances (likely *Fakenham and Wells Times*), c. 28 May 1982, Cherub Archive.

[38] Visnevski, interview, 17 August 2005.

[39] B.A. Young, "Twelfth Night/Upstream," review of *Twelfth Night* by Cherub Company, *Financial Times*, October 18, 1982.

[40] Andrew Visnevski, letter to John Falkner, September 15, 1982, Cherub Archive.

[41] Frances Lonsdale Donaldson, *The British Council: The First Fifty Years* (London, J. Cape, 1984), 1.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 231.

[44] John Faulkner, letter to Andrew Visnevski, January 10, 1983, Cherub Archive.

[45] Ibid.

[46] "AMcK," ACGB Show Report, July 6, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[47] Nicholas Barter, Drama Department Show Report, July 7, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[48] John Bond, Drama Department Show Report, September 18, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[49] Mike Alfreds, Show Report, November 9, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[50] John Bowen, Drama Department Show Report, November 9, 1981, ACGB Archive.

[51] Mike Alfreds, Show Report, January 5, 1983, ACGB Archive.

[52] Sinclair, *Arts and Cultures*, 219.

[53] Robert Sykes, letter to Dennis Andrews, March 9, 1983, Cherub Archive.

[54] Dennis Andrews, letter to Robert Sykes, March 17, 1983, Cherub Archive.

[55] Dennis Andrews, letter to Andrew Visnevski, June 7, 1984, ACGB Archive.

[56] Andrew Visnevski, letter to Dennis Andrews, June 15, 1984, Cherub Archive.

[57] Emma Crichton-Miller, "Getting on Famously," *Independent,* August 12, 1989, 30.

[58] "On a Wing and a Prayer," *Direct: The Journal of the Director's Guild of Great Britain,* October 1989, 9.

[59] Crichton-Miller, "Getting on Famously," 30.

[60] Anthony Best, personal interview with author, Dec. 16, 2010.

[61] Jonathan Burston, "Recombinant Broadway," *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 23, no. 2 (April 2009): 162.

[62] Donaldson, *The British Council*, 1.

[63] Ibid, 317-9.

[64] Paul J. Smith, memo to Peter Elborn, October 8, 1987, British Council Archive, British Council, London, UK.

[65] Quoted in Kate Dorney, "Touring and the Regional Repertoire," in *The Glory of the Garden: English Regional Theatre and the Arts Council* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 108.

[66] Peter Elborn, telex to Paul J. Smith, October 19, 1988, British Council Archive.

[67] Vi Marriott, "Cherub Company tour to Iraq and Pakistan," undated report, c. December 1988, British Council Archive, 6.

[68] Ibid, 7.

[69] Best, interview.

[70] Anthony Wise, personal interview with author, September 8, 2011.

[71] Best, interview.

[72] Vi Marriott, "An Ambassadorial Role," *Traveller* 25, no. 4 (Autumn 1995), 8.

[73] Ian Hoskins, "Theatre: Man with the Midas Touch," *Herald* (Harare, Zimbabwe), April 28, 1989, British Council Archive.

[74] "Cherub Theatre Challenges Rigid Approach towards Classics," *Morning News* (Karachi, Pakistan), Nov. 25, 1988, British Council Archive.

[75] Vi Marriott, "The Cherub Company Keeps the British Spirit of Exploration Alive," undated report to British Council, c. Summer 1989, Cherub Archive.

[76] Craig, *Dreams and Deconstructions*, 10. (see chap. I, note 13)

[77] Dorney, "Touring and the Regional Repertoire," 108.

[78] Dickon Reed, letter to Andrew Visnevski, July 22, 1983, Cherub Archive.

[79] Kate Dorney and Ros Merkin, introduction to *The Glory of the Garden: English Regional Theatre and the Arts Council*, eds. Dorney and Merkin (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 4.

[80] Peacock, *Thatcher's Theatre*, 46-7.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

"Don't think about making art. Just get it done.
Let everyone else decide if it's good or bad,
whether they love it or hate it.
While they're deciding, make even more art."
– Andy Warhol

Actor Chris Gunning, in a Cherub Company newsletter in 1999 about the company's production of Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Edward II of England,* wrote:

> As a company, none of us in the cast of *Edward* suffered […] anxiety over our notices because we wanted name checks or particular personal praise – when you play with Cherub, it is very much a team game. What we wanted were good enough notices to get a big enough audience to ensure that we – that is, Cherub – have a future.[1]

Gunning was merely the most recent Cherub actor to hope that the company he belonged to had a future. A full decade after Cherub's last British Council tour, the company had produced eight more shows but had still never made a breakthrough with either the ACGB or its successor, the Arts Council of England.[*] The reviewers praised, the crowds came, but Cherub never caught the positive attention of the British funding agency that could secure its survival. Gunning and his cohort were merely the successors of a long line of actors, designers, composers and technical staff who stayed with Cherub for as long as possible, but in the end were forced to seek more lucrative opportunities elsewhere. By the time of Visnevski's last season with Cherub in 2003, the core company had gone, and he did the show with "all new students, graduating students, all

[*] The ACGB was broken up in 1994 into three organizations, one each for England, Scotland and Wales, thus completing the full-fledged move toward devolving the organization which had begun in the early 1980s. Following a 2003 merger between the Arts Council of England and the regional arts boards, the organization became known as Arts Council England, the name it retains to this day.

people I didn't know," and without the usual "core of experienced Cherub players who could inspire and draw into the style and draw into the short-hand language that a director has with his company, [this] new group of young people."[2] On the eve of the company's 25th anniversary in December 2003, Visnevski and administrator Vi Marriott announced they were leaving the company.

Throughout the 1990s, still without funding, Cherub had soldiered on, propped up by Vi Marriott's diligent work to persuade British Rail to allow Cherub to use several railway arches in Midland Road near St. Pancras rail station as a combination office and rehearsal space in 1991.[†] The Midland Road space allowed Cherub a London base from which to launch several productions: *Dythirambos, A Song for the Twice-Born* (1992), John Spurling's *The Butcher of Baghdad* (1993), and Aphra Behn's commedia-inspired *Emperor of the Moon* (1994). The company was still cash-poor, and launching major new tours was increasingly difficult. Indeed, the necessity for small London-based companies was lessened with the Arts Council of England's increased focus on funding regional theatres and developing home-grown companies in the regions.

Visnevski and Marriott were still the only permanent company members, and both were largely working for no salary. As the 1980s had worn on, Visnevski was increasingly forced to take work outside of Cherub to sustain himself. "Early on in the Cherub times, people were asking me, 'why don't I teach at a drama school,'" Visnevski said. "For many years I thought I had not enough experience to pass on and that it would be arrogant of me to approach the drama schools." In 1987, however, Visnevski was

[†] Yet another moment of foreshadowing between Cherub and the companies that would follow: railway arches became a primary location for alternative productions in the 21st century. In particular, a series of arches under London Bridge rail station became the home of Shunt for a couple of their productions, and these arches have since been used by other companies. Another space operated by the Old Vic, the Old Vic Tunnels, is located under Waterloo rail station.

himself approached by two different drama schools. Barbara Todd, Registrar of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts (RADA), and formerly of the British Council, invited Visnevski to meet with RADA's Principal, Oliver Neville. Visnevski began to teach and to occasionally direct at RADA, at first for the three-year acting programme and later for the MA course in Text and Performance.

A more formal association developed between Cherub and Arts Educational Schools London. "Arts Ed also contacted me in 1987 and offered me a public production and the relationship continued," Visnevski said. "In the early 1990s [Arts Ed Acting Company head] Adrian James ... was keen that I should use some of my Cherub experience directly to help the students in different ways: help them set up post-training projects, contact festivals with productions initiated at Arts Ed, etc." Visnevski's involvement with RADA and Arts Ed – and later the drama schools of Webber Douglas and Mountview – would lead to a new direction for the company. In 1995, Cherub spawned the Theatre Alive! program to guide actors and designers as they transitioned from training into professional theatre. Visnevski maintains his association with Theatre Alive! to this day, though he is no longer working with Cherub. Through its Theatre Alive! platform, Cherub co-produced Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1996), Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Edward II of England* (1998) and *Merchant of Venice* (1999) with Arts Ed, using a mix of Cherub actors and students completing the post-graduate actor training course at Arts Ed. "[We would] start the production at Arts Ed," Visnevski explained, "as a collaboration between the two and bring in a stage manager, composer and designer.... [Cherub] provided some of the costumes and paid for some of them and they paid for the production. And I brought in three professional actors, which of course

made the stakes so much higher for the graduating students."[3]

The Arts Ed collaborations fueled a revival of Cherub in the mid-1990s, and Visnevski would push the students into Cherub's artistic vortex. Visnevski's productions with Arts Ed brought a new group of people into the Cherub Company, several of whom would remain with Visnevski for several years. *Edward II*, after its initial run at Arts Ed, embarked on a national tour. Visnevski, as was his wont, had directed Brecht's play not as an update of Marlowe, but as a play of its own standing and merit, using Europe in 1924 as a basis for the design and concept for the production, rather than Edward's medieval or Marlowe's Elizabethan England. "Having once decided that *The Life of Edward II* was a play contemporary in 1924, I sought out the trends, the artistic trends, the music and the artists current in 1924." One of these was George Grosz whose "brilliant collages which express society with a political statement, a social statement," [4] and the other was Max Beckmann, whose distorted fairground scenes offered the ability for Visnevski to return to a childhood love for circuses as he had done in other productions. Cherub resident designer Jason Southgate created a rectangular platform that moved and spun as the central scenic piece. The platform had four tall posts at each corner that were connected by rods and strung with plastic shower curtains – resembling a four-poster bed – and could be used to close off the platform or the area upstage of the platform from view. The Beckmann paintings led to the platform as "the stage for the royal family in *Edward II.* And Edward descends the stage, he lowers himself from this heightened position of this revolving platform … to enter the lower stage, the street level, with his lover Gaveston."[5] The platform acted as an abstract space and became a location – through minor additions or hidden compartments – for myriad scenes, including

Edward's degradation scene in the sewers as well as the location for Edward's murder at Lightborn's hand.

The costume design was a mix of periods, the characters becoming a fantastic menagerie of Weimar music-hall rejects, a collage of the excessively grotesque: King Edward II in gold lame with platform boots, Queen Anne in a long red rubber dress, both nodding to Beckmann's work and "with more than a hint of '20s whorehouse or transvestite cabaret and modern 'glam-rock' about them," Visnevski said.[6] Edward's opposition then became "a chorus of frock-coated bourgeois barons who could have stepped from the canvases of Dix or Grosz and are supplemented by puppets of themselves," as one review noted.[7] The actors all had their faces painted white, grossly accentuated with patches of colour, seeming to mutilate their features, a la Grosz. Visnevski's production was both unforgettable and disturbing. As Mortimer and Queen Anne, in particular, gain more power, their costumes and make-up make them more grotesque and misshapen: Anne in layers of black fabric and fur, and Mortimer with a white plaster-like bandanna on his head, seeming to become ill and more and more disgusting throughout the show.

By all accounts, Brecht had experimented with many of his *Verfremdung* ideas in his production of *Edward II*, and Visnevski worked to exploit those in his "offstage production":

> The use of heightened language. . .the use of the street ballad singer sort of performance... And it made me think on many, many, many levels, including allowing the actors to change, discreetly, but within the view of the public, and in the end we also ran the music in the view of the public. The actors would go offstage and press the buttons of the tape recorder to play the music for the other actors. So in fact in the end I managed to engage the actors, apart from the changing of the lights, which was done by our lighting designer from the box, into every activity of performing that incredibly intricate play.[8]

Brecht's experiments on "alienation" in *Edward II* led him to declaring that "it was for the author and the producer to present the world in an unfamiliar light. It was the actor's responsibility not to take the edge off that unfamiliarity by losing himself in the play."[9] Certainly, for the lay observer, Visnevski pushed his mix of student and professional actors into a style that is disconcerting and, for lack of a better word, alienating:

> I always said to [the Cherub actors], there is no point in doing theatre unless you are going to tread a very, very narrow line between the sublime and the ridiculous. And if the performance isn't good, you'll fall into the ridiculous or into the vacuous, over-coloured and rather empty. But you have to take that risk. Because if you fulfil what you need to fulfil, if you fulfil the requirements of the drama and the production, and you act with every fiber of your nervous system, and you challenge yourself physically and emotionally and mentally to go through this process, you will create a unique, unforgettable experience for your audience and there is no point doing anything else.[10]

As was typical of Cherub, the production was somewhat controversial. Most of the national critics who had admired Cherub were gone, though many of the newer critics found the production to be sublime – "a vivid and singular production," one wrote.[11] But some did not, and Nick Curtis' review in the *Evening Standard* was as hostile as anything the ACGB had ever said:

> once again, the misunderstood theatrical theories of Bertolt Brecht are used as an excuse for lamentably bad overacting and arrogantly lazy direction. . . .The actors, wearing clownish costumes camp it up and shout a lot. Total Theatre? More like total rubbish. . . .Towards the end, [Edward] stands while buckets of excrement are dumped on him. Having endured Visnevski's production, I know exactly how he felt.[12]

The review recalled those 1980s ACGB reports, this time printed for all the world to read. So negative was the review that noted British designers Sir Ralph Koltai and Disley Jones, among others, wrote to the *Standard* editor, defending the production. Under the headline "King is far from dead," the *Standard* printed what amounted to a retraction,

featuring Koltai and Jones's letters. "Visnevski's production shows an understanding, instinctive perhaps, dramatically superior to any other Brecht in this country that I can recollect," Koltai wrote,[13] and Jones echoed that sentiment:

> I wonder if Nick Curtis was born when the Berliner Ensemble visited London with its wonderful seasons at the Palace (1956) and Old Vic (1965) theatres. […] What is truly remarkable about Mr. Visnevski's production of *Edward II* is its bizarre quality – satirical cabaret hitting out at a decaying and decadent society, using clownish and rather ridiculous make-up and costumes to consolidate the gruesome truth of it all. […] The Weimar Republic, in which Brecht grew up, was the nursery of so much extraordinary art including the Bauhaus, Neher, Grosz, and Heckroth. One should be truly grateful to the Cherub Theatre Company for so valiantly giving us a taste of it[14].

Curtis himself made no direct reply. The Cherub of the 1990s, while certainly less prolific, was still potent.

The Future of Cherub

The ACGB's staff of the 1980s could not have imagined that, though the company suffered significantly from the lack of subsidy, Visnevski himself would find a place in the theatre mainstream: in educational institutions. Visnevski's shift into education is the prime site for a conventional investigation of Cherub's lingering impact on the cultural field, as teaching and mentoring is one of the most traditional means of assessing one person's influence upon another. Visnevski has been working in drama schools since the late 1980s, with incalculable numbers of students. I can only begin to speculate on how Visnevski's presence has shifted the training programme at the various institutions he has been involved with, and further examination of who has studied under him and how they've utilized their training is needed. Here, in the conclusion to my dissertation, I will only make a few speculative attempts at understanding Visnevski's

impact via education.

Visnevski is now ensconced as the associate head of the MA programs at RADA, though he had previously been an instructor on various acting training courses. Visnevski currently works with students whose theatrical ambitions are much broader than just acting, especially those students in the MA program in Text and Performance, which seeks "to deepen and extend an awareness of drama and plays in performance and encourage the students' own creative practice."[15] My own work with Visnevski was in the scene study section of the MA course, where students, guided by an instructor, investigate a particular theatrical text through deconstruction, focusing first on understanding the elements of the text in its original historical and theatrical context, and then working to piece the text back together for a shortened contemporary performance. From my own experience, Visnevski's concentration on text analysis is fundamental to his approach to teaching this course, which is in agreement with what many of the Cherub actors told me about his rehearsal process in production. "How does he work? I think from the text," Paul Hegarty told me. "When we did *Duchess of Malfi*, we sat round for a long time and [made] sense [of the text], and that is something that is absolutely critical." From there, the next step, as Hegarty described it from his experience in rehearsals, is to breathe life into the text, and this was just as true in the scene study course. "Clearly you are trying to assimilate the style into the performance, and the performance is just one aspect of the piece," Hegarty told me. "The lines themselves are not, each line is not so riveting to do, but you're trying to orchestrate it, and that's what he does."[16]

Visnevski has absolutely brought his experience in working with Cherub to his

educational work. In 2011, Visnevski created and is convening the new Theatre Lab MA, which features, according to RADA's website, "a strong emphasis on devised and group work, and students are taught to approach the process of developing performance from a post-Stanislavskian framework."[17] Visnevski has coalesced much of the work he did in re-training the Cherub actors for his productions into a full MA course. "Students are introduced to the approaches and responses of later practitioners, including Grotowski, Brecht, Copeau, and Sanford Meisner," RADA's prospectus reads. The course "will place special emphasis on the links between historical, improvisational and physical practice (e.g. Commedia) and the developments in experimental theatre, new writing and performance since the middle of the twentieth century." While Visnevski is not currently working with vocational acting students nor with professional actors per se, the Theatre Lab MA is geared toward actors who have completed their academic degrees (or drama training) elsewhere and wish to engage with more experimental techniques. Only time will tell how this will impact performance and production in the UK, but the fact that such a course is in place at one of the premier theatre conservatories in the country is surely a monumental change from the days of the "boy next door" system of acting Visnevski bristled against while in drama school in the early 1970s.

Several of the Cherub actors I spoke with were happy that Visnevski was working with younger actors, especially since many of their own careers began by working with Cherub in a Visnevski production. Cherub productions often featured younger actors, both by choice and by necessity. In the early period, recently-graduated actors fresh from drama school were hired for the company's shows largely through personal connections between company members and either individual students or to the drama school itself.

As Cherub's financial status did not improve and they could not afford to pay actors except when on tour, drama school students were the most economical choice to cast. Fairly green actors were commonplace in nearly every Cherub production, especially those after 1992. Visnevski understood their limitations, and pushed many of them to excel. Tony Wise remembered a specific incident from one of his first shows with Cherub:

> I remember doing a scene, and I had just started sort of crying.... And Andrew sort of at the end of it, "Tony, Tony, that's absolutely marvelous … give me more, give me more of those tears." That note gave me the confidence as an actor to let go. He was the first director who ever told me it was alright to let go emotionally, you know. Sometimes he may have gone too far, and Andrew wasn't always that good at reigning you back, but he unleashed something in me, and that was my first moment when I knew I was going to be an actor. Andrew actually unlocked that, "yes do it; that is wonderful work you are doing. You take a risk. You go somewhere." He did that for me. And I will never forget that moment.[18]

Though good with young actors, Hegarty also insists that Visnevski's particularly demanding style when directing perhaps has prevented more senior actors from working with him, thus making drama schools an ideal place for him. Hegarty:

> Actors are not just moving puppets, and of course it is not easy I suspect for Andrew to work with actors sometimes. I respect him, [but] if you work with him experienced, [you see] it's easier for him to work with younger people who are either in awe or amazement about how you approach the work. Whereas, someone like David Acton or myself or Mary [Keegan], when you've got older and more experience, you bring something to the party.[19]

But sometimes the newer actors also bristled at the work. When Visnevski directed drama school productions, even those for Arts Ed with their mix of professional actors and students, he continued to direct as he had always done with his company. Watching one of his later productions for RADA, a revival of the Cherub production *Ten Days Amaze*, I could discern a spare style and that he had encouraged the actors to push the boundary between the sublime and the ridiculous. But, as he told me at the time,

getting the RADA actors to acknowledge that the work he was doing with them was valuable was a challenge, and he felt a lot of resistance to his work and his style. As Jeff Lewis, a RADA acting graduate and a Cherub company member for some of the later productions, noted:

> Part of the problem with a lot of acting training in drama schools, certainly in this country, … everything is based on Stanislavski's [system], a kind of Americanized version of it. And the problem with that is you are not necessarily exposed to other ways of working, and other approaches to text, characterization, to acting generally. So I think for a lot of people, when they started working with Andrew, after two years of doing Stanislavski, it was a bit of a shock. Which again, isn't to say that Andrew doesn't sometimes work in a kind of Stanislavski way. You know, he'll ask you what your action is, if he thinks it is kind of necessary for the scene. But you kind of will begin in lots of other different places as well. So it was a shock for a lot people, but, yeah, it fascinated me; I loved it. Perhaps because I am kind of naturally and instinctively that way as an actor a little bit maybe, so I don't mind putting on black and white makeup and being asked to be more grotesque and physically more heightened than you might be in another kind of play.[20]

In their pioneering work on the French education system, published as *The Inheritors*, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron wrote that in schools students "will be judged by the criteria of the cultivated elite, which many teachers readily make their own, even and especially when their membership in the 'elite' dates from their entry into the teaching profession."[21] The educational system is a prime site for the transmission of cultural ideals, and because of the evaluative criteria, the system tends to support students who replicate established practices. Writing of the British system of actor training, Ben Francombe writes that "the drama school [sees] itself as part of an industry, providing a kind of industrial apprenticeship: as the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School prospectus for the year 2000 puts it, 'we regard a student's first day here as the first day of his or her career.'"[22] British actor training is designed to funnel students directly into the culture industry, and that would seem to require that its evaluations be based on supporting the

dominant system of production.

Visnevski's place at RADA marks a significant change in the mainstream method of actor training. He is, of course, one of many former "alternative" practitioners to teach his methods in secondary schools, at drama schools or in universities; perhaps principally among the former is the playwright Edward Bond who has turned his attention in recent years to writing and producing plays for school-aged children,[‡] and among the latter group is Baz Kershaw, now a fairly prominent academic and scholar. Visnevski, though, is one of the few who has achieved a leadership role at one of the major drama schools. British drama schools train actors specifically for success in the professional sphere, which increasingly means teaching them skills for television and film acting. This obviously sets up a real dichotomy for these schools: how does one train actors when they must be prepared to both work naturalistically on television, and expressionistically and physically on stage? Looking specifically at RADA, students can now access acting training that acknowledges physical and experimental forms increasingly prevalent in contemporary British theatre.[§] RADA's Theatre Lab MA does not replace Stanislavski-based training but rather extends it through re-training or being supplemental training for students in experimentation and devising work.

Actors who have been shaped by adherents to Stanislavski's system have generally been taught to create and embody a single character within a set of given

[‡] This segment of theatre, formerly classed as an "alternative project," is called in Britain "theatre-in-education" or TIE. TIE work is perhaps one of the most pronounced "successes" of the 1970s alternative theatre, especially as the ACGB began requiring companies receiving subsidy to do education and outreach work. Britain also has a fairly prominent (and subsidized) National Youth Theatre which has performed plays by many notable playwrights and often produces short seasons on the stages of the National Theatre in London.

[§] Without further study, I cannot say which drama schools have expanded their training to include physical theatre and devised work. No recent study of drama schools and universities has been published that specifically documents current trends in acting training in the UK.

circumstances, having the character come from an essentially psychological approach. Expressionistic/experimental/physical theatre often requires that actors play multiple roles within a single production, and so requires that a character be worn as if it were a coat, existing solely on the surface, communicated primarily through physical choices of action. Despite the disparate motivations, one set of practices can clearly be used to enhance the other, and a mix of the two offers actors the skill to play both the nuances of realism and the extremes of physical theatre. One should not, however, assume that the acceptance of Visnevski and other experimental practitioners in British drama schools is a total uprooting of historical acting training. I note a significant emphasis remains in establishing Stanislavski (code for realism) as the bedrock of the training (indeed, even the MA Theatre Lab situates itself with explorations that are "post-Stanislavski"). Stanislavski and realism are still fundamental because of the reality of the marketplace: film and television acting are much more financially rewarding for those actors who are hired to do so. At the same time, as Visnevski realized back in the 1970s, realism's emphasis on getting actors to perform as if in real life also seems to erase emotional and physical extremes as if they are not a part of real life. Particularly in Britain, audiences have become less and less accustomed to seeing these extremes played out on television and in film, and that expectation has carried over into the theatre.[**] This is the precise style of acting that Visnevski was attempting to uproot with Cherub, and the MA Theatre Lab is a continuation of that mission.

The Cherub Company's impact on British theatre may be mitigated by its lack of conventional "success," but perhaps the true success is in the establishment of Visnevski

[**] The question of the extremes at play in, and the so-called "realism" or even "naturalism" of, reality television is a potentially relevant discussion, though not one I can take the time to unpack here.

as an educator. Perhaps through teaching, Visnevski will be able to reach some of the goals he set for himself and which he tried to achieve with Cherub:

> I kept using the simile of a tightrope walker: a great production is like a tightrope walker, somewhere between the sublime and the ridiculous all the time. And you tip the scale this way or that way, but try not to fall off the rope, you know. And like Meyerhold said, if as many people hate the production as they love it, that means it's a success. I always said to my actors the most damning statement any member of the audience can say to you is, "oh, that was ok." Or "that was alright." And that's totally damning, because it means you haven't done anything, you shouldn't be doing it. I was desperately passionate that we make a very personal statement, almost embarrassing. That we should embarrass an audience if necessary.[23]

Only time will tell if Visnevski or his students or his students' students will achieve the liberation of British theatre from realism that Visnevski has sought since the 1970s.

Cherub's Legacy

The inclusion of Visnevski into British drama schools signifies a change in the expectations of the cultural field. As new companies emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, the idea of "physical theatre" as a legitimate production mode within the UK gained increased traction, in spite of its European gestation. Complicité (originally Theatre de Complicité) was founded in 1983, and, originally categorized as "mime," fell under the ACGB's Dance department, where it secured its early funding. It was also rather bold in securing corporate sponsorship; by 1987, the beer company Beck's was sponsoring their tours, which largely played in pubs around England, "bringing Beck's into direct contact with the independent-minded drinker who enjoys alternative comedy with his alternative beer."[24] DV8 began in 1986, also as a dance company, "to develop a hybrid dance vocabulary that would deal with real social issues."[25] Trestle was created in 1980, and "developed a distinctive style of theatre using masks, puppets and music."[26]

These companies and many others would be joined in the 1990s and 2000s by companies like Headlong, Shunt, Forced Entertainment and Frantic Assembly. Physical theatre was now mainstream and no longer in total opposition to the British historical focus on text, and it re-enlivened actors who had "appeared to be locked in rigor mortis" as they performed.[27]

But what of Cherub in the midst of all of this change? Though the company was still producing across the 1990s, and though it had a long history of creating productions which were bringing texts to new life in a very physical way, the company is not ever credited (or even mentioned) alongside 1970s alternative companies like Welfare State, Impact or Lumiere and Son (and, indeed, the work of Littlewood and Brook before them) as prototypes for the type of physical theatre that would come later. Cherub's physical style was radically different from mainstream practice in the 1980s, but the texts they chose to produce were largely classical ones. Thus, the company could not comfortably be fitted into the "new work" box since it produced few newly-written plays, but neither was it seen as "innovative" because the work they produced was based in classical text. The so-called innovations that became physical theatre in the late 1980s and early 1990s were often dance-inspired (hence the categorization of Complicité as "mime" by the ACGB). Despite the fact that they were clearly utilizing methods which would become hallmarks of the later physical companies, Cherub was categorized as a text-based company, and so was unable to take advantage financially when the ACGB began funding physical theatre.

The binary between text-based and non-text-based work in the UK is due to a long-standing focus of British theatre historiography on theatrical texts as literature. As

Alison Oddey writes in her book *Devising Theatre*, "the dominant tradition of theatre and criticism has always been about the relationship of writing and performance."[28] The focus on literature has often led to the obstruction or disinterest in examining the theatrical practices that brought these texts to the stage, and it tends to erase companies like Cherub who do not fall firmly on either side of the divide. Further, as Jen Harvie notes, "the apparent truth of British theatre as fundamentally literary is so frequently and often uncritically [said] that it is reinforced and naturalized, producing potentially damaging effects."[29] The literary focus, coupled with a fear of acknowledging cultural influences from abroad, has prevented historians from undertaking research into what I'll call "hybrid" (European and British) companies, and Harvie emphasizes that historians have ignored these types of performances even though "non-British drama and theatre – including continental European epic, expressionist, circus, and other physical forms of theatre – have been consistently produced and have made a strong impact across British theatre practices." While the influence of Brecht and other political theatres have been widely explored by historians, Harvie continues, "other [foreign] influences – such as that of Meyerhold, Artaud, Ionesco, Grotowski, Bausch, Barba, Lecoq, and even Stanislavski – have yet to be fully considered."[30] Though Harvie uses this explanation to justify her own examination of Complicité and DV8, other companies (like Cherub) remain excluded from examination.

The historiographical problem of Cherub, of course, is that it does not fall comfortably into any of these categories: it was neither purely text-based nor non-text based, and it does not have one clear European stylistic influence. Grotowski certainly influenced Visnevski, but not necessarily any more than anyone else had. Much of the

physicality of the acting in Cherub's productions could easily be traced back to Vsevelod Meyerhold's work in Russia in the early-20th century; indeed, I'm sure Cherub isn't the same without Meyerhold. But Meyerhold himself was barely known outside the Soviet Union until the early 1970s, as he'd been effectively erased after his execution at the hands of a Soviet firing squad in 1940. Indeed, Grotowski's claim of being influenced by Meyerhold is likely a large reason why Meyerhold is known in the West.[††] As I documented in Chapter III, Visnevski doesn't claim Grotowski or Meyerhold or Brook or any one artist as an influence; he utilized techniques from many of the various artists Harvie lists. One can only speculate if Cherub would have been perceived differently if it could have been clearly associated with the legacy of only one other artist (as Complicité was with Lecoq). Perhaps the company's very complicated European genealogy, when brought into Britain, prevented Cherub's work from being understood because it was not specifically work that honored the legacy of a single artist of international fame and importance.

The other problem with Cherub's work, of course, is that in many cases, they chose classic English plays to perform rather than new plays. The real threat in their work was that they deconstructed and repurposed these plays, mixing and matching Englishness and foreignness. Like the over-dubbed *Singing Ringing Tree*, in a Cherub show one could discern both the classic play text as well as the stylized world of the production. Had Cherub chosen new plays, perhaps the hybridity would have been less jarring for the ACGB, for even when they produced "neglected classics" like *Two Noble*

[††] As a student of the State Institute of Theatre Arts in Moscow between 1955-56, Grotowski undertook a study of Russian directors, including Stanislavski and Meyerhold. As Zbigniew Osinski reports, "He went to Moscow to study the [Stanislavski] method at its source. But his stay brought more than he'd hoped for. He discovered Meyerhold. He studied his legacy, ...and he left Moscow fascinated by what he'd found" (*Grotowski and His Laboratory*, 18).

Kinsmen or *Chaste Maid in Cheapside* (the latter being far more commonly-produced in the UK today), the sense of literary Englishness remained. While Cherub's work would perhaps be seen as commonplace today, in the 1980s, the ACGB's staff seems to have wanted companies doing classic work to acknowledge the legacy of those texts, to demonstrate an understanding of what had come before. Visnevski was not interested in those legacies; he was interested in exploring and conveying the ideas in the plays he admired and had chosen for production. Hence Cherub produced the Asian-medieval *Macbeth* or the commedia-inspired *Twelfth Night*. Or the production of *As You Like It* (1984) where, as Visnevski described it:

> The idea was that we should play it within the magical dragon of the alchemical quest, and the dragon is called Uruboros, a dragon that eats its own tail. And it's colored green and red. And the dragon created a cave and it stretched out and went round the whole space and up again, eating its own tail. And under the dragon, we had spears, put into weights, and on the spears, hung different symbols, which could be used for dance between the scenes to represent different stages of the alchemical quest. And it starts in a world of lead, in a world that all you have onstage are metal spikes, horrible music, and the dragon was covered in a gauze which looked like rhyme ice. And when spring came in the forest, we rolled off the cloth that covered the dragon and the vibrant green and red came out and the second half of the play started.

Visnevski specifically wanted to bring life to classical texts, to re-establish theatre as a medium separate from film and television. He reached back into theatre history to revive and restore plays and production techniques which were specifically *theatrical*. Whether nor not the ACGB recognized this strategy, they did not condone it and specifically set a course of action to prevent Cherub's work from receiving the subsidy which would have allowed the company to grow and develop.

In the introduction, I criticized Harvie's study of European-inspired British theatre for not going far enough at breaking down received notions of influence and

importance. The implication that I take from Harvie is that when British companies whose influence is perceived to be greater have not yet been examined, what is the value for historians in looking at a company like Cherub that almost no one has ever heard of? The cycle thus repeats itself, confining companies like Cherub to the historical dustbin. To ignore Cherub undermines the potential of any theatre production, not just the "important" ones, to inspire or influence another. In the "alternative British theatre historiography" she writes in *Staging the UK*, Harvie recognizes a wide range of British performances by foreign artists like the Berliner Ensemble in London in 1956; the Comedie Francaise at Edinburgh in 1948 and in London in 1951; Peter Daubeny's World Theatre Seasons on the West End from 1964 to 1973, featuring major companies from Western and Eastern Europe, Asia, the USA and Japan; the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre, London's Gate, the London International Festival of Theatre (LIFT), and several other "important (if often repressed) instances where twentieth-century mainland European theatre in particular has been introduced to and has influenced British theatre."[31] Because Cherub does not have the symbolic capital of any of these companies, does that mean they have had no impact on the cultural field? Most of the theatrical performances Harvie cites were one-time occurrences (or short runs) in London or Edinburgh. The only interaction any British audience member might have had with those companies was to view their performances or (for those lucky enough) to participate in a workshop or talkback event which may have been scheduled. This is no different than how anyone might have experienced Cherub's work.

The primary difference is in the parerga around the event: those viewing Brecht or attending the LIFT festival understood that these companies were important, because they

were told as much by the marketing of the productions. Cherub could not make that claim for itself at its own productions in the UK, though significantly the British Council had done exactly that on Cherub's tours abroad. Importance in both instances comes out of a desire to convey a type of meaning to the audience in advance of the production. That it can be applied contextually is an indicator that it is a subjective designation and can thus be employed at will; importance is granted by the arbiters of the cultural field. Importance is one means by which historians prioritize the history they wish to tell. One cannot tell the entire history of the world; one must pick and choose what will be included in the narrative when everything cannot possibly be included. We must, though, periodically interrogate the means by which we prioritize, and we must be aware of how our priorities will impact the way history is shaped. That we will inevitably leave some history out of our narratives is not in doubt, but that doesn't mean that we must base our own priorities exclusively upon those who have gone before. By continually reinscribing the notion of importance, we cannot imagine what we have lost.

Periodically historians find cause to lament that those who went before did not take care to save things that we would now find valuable. Extant materials have been passed down to us because historians and scholars of the past believed them to be important enough to save. We do not always agree with the judgements of the past, and how sorely we now might wish we had a fuller representation of the plays of Aeschylus, even the "bad" ones. What might we know if we had access to the things that were lost? An emphasis on the important tends to obscure the work behind and around that which is important; we might learn just as much by examining those things which have not been deemed important, though we cannot do so after the fact because we tend to lose them

over time.

The time to examine the work of a company like Cherub is before its work is lost. The vast majority of the performers, designers and technicians who worked with Cherub are currently under 65, and most are willing and available to share their experiences and reflections on the company's productions. If one were to "discover" Cherub again in 50 years, the vast majority of these people would have died with no record of their work with the company. Additionally, I have found the company's paper archive invaluable for learning about the company, and had I not elected to explore Cherub and its work now, boxes and boxes of documents which detail the inner workings of an alternative company working in Britain from 1978 to 2003 would have been lost. In 2011, the eight-year holding period for financial and company documents would have passed, and Visnevski and Marriott would likely have discarded the vast majority of the company's archive. I cannot yet imagine what else may be gleaned from the boxes of documents, or how some other researcher might be able to use these "bones" in a different way than I have. And, of course, Cherub's archive is not the only one at risk: the archives of numerous other companies are likely sitting in dusty basements or beneath someone's bed, waiting to be unearthed and perhaps discarded by people who no longer have a use for them.

Using Cherub's story as a call to re-examine historiographic importance enables us to see how institutions tend to reaffirm the standards set by another, more powerful institution within the cultural field. Institutions shape people: families, schools, churches, the military. The field of cultural production contains numerous institutions engaged in assorted cultural projects. In the introduction, I quoted Bourdieu's definition of the

cultural field that, in part, is "a system for reproducing producers of a determinate type of cultural goods, and the consumer capable of consuming them." The cultural field and its institutions train people to develop likings for a particular type of cultural good, and it also relies upon those same institutions to train people to create that type of good. All the institutions within a field are connected to each other, and at times they alternately contest and affirm the practices of the others. Over time, certain practices within the field become normalized, and various institutions are expected to cater to those norms.

In Cherub's case, one institution, the ACGB, made a determination about Cherub and its work. In the cultural field of the 1980s, the ACGB held a great amount of power, especially via its granting of economic capital in the form of arts subsidy. As I tracked in Chapter IV, the ACGB's stamp of approval was a significant determining factor for how other institutions came to understand a company. For a time, Cherub's productions were able to convince enough people (especially media institutions and the British Council) that the company was worthy of attention in spite of the ACGB's decisions. The position was not ultimately sustainable for Cherub, because with little money they could not continue to produce enough shows to keep themselves in the minds of the media and the British Council. Over time, especially as the critics and British Council staff members who were sympathetic to Cherub moved on, even the institutions who supported them began to look elsewhere. By the time of *Edward II* in 1998, most of the media ignored Cherub's shows, and some of the few critics that did review the production were hostile. The ACGB's determination ultimately was adopted by all of the other institutions within the field, save for some educational institutions who viewed Visnevski as a worthy candidate to train their students in a different type of performance mode.

To meditate on the subject briefly: institutions shape us, and while sometimes we are not conscious of how they do so, many of us have expectations about how we will be shaped. People go through life in multiple institutions, sometimes participating in several at once, sometimes moving from one institution to another, in all cases learning and growing and developing. Generally, many of us hope to be able to choose the institutions in which to participate. Though we cannot choose them all, our choices allow a measure of freedom in deciding how we prefer to be shaped. When a student chooses to enter a school, for instance, she expects the institution to nurture and to guide her, developing and allowing her to grow. Instructors are expected to offer their knowledge and to push the development of the mind and to channel students' energies into fulfilling their potential. At a later job, that graduate wants the institution to offer the opportunity to master her current position and the freedom and encouragement to pursue her passions and to acquire additional responsibilities as her experience increases.

The disappointment that some of us experience when an institution fails to uphold its end of the bargain is significant. Institutions are supposed to fulfill the trust we've placed in them, and sometimes over time we discover that what we've chosen isn't actually what we were promised (or even that we've changed our minds about what we want). Sometimes institutions fail to assist in our growth or to offer us possibilities to excel. If we have the ability to move on, to change jobs or transfer schools, we can then change course and choose a different path, taking along the things that we have learned, ready to learn and be shaped by a new institution. Sometimes, though, we cannot move on. Certain institutions cannot be avoided, or similar positions are not open to us in other institutions. We then become stuck in an institution we cannot escape.

Theatre companies could not avoid the ACGB in the 1970s and '80s. Theatre in Britain had become dependent on government subsidy to remain viable. Simply raising the price of tickets would not be enough to cover a company's expenses, and especially for artists working at the fringe level, audiences came to believe in a limit to how much they should be expected to pay. Where a ticket to a West End musical might command £50, no audience member would pay a similar price to see a show on the fringe, no matter how good the production. The ACGB's stated mission "to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts" seemed to promise a lot of artists an opportunity to grow and develop with a little security from the government's financial assistance; in other words, they were granted "the right to fail."

In practice, though, the ACGB was not a democratic agency: it funded and supported those artists which clearly fit within its expectations. And while some companies like Cheek by Jowl can boast that the ACGB helped them develop and grow,[32] other companies or artists could not. Cherub, though the ACGB professed numerous times that they were looking for the company to improve over time, was never offered any guidance or assistance on how the company could achieve improvement in the ACGB's eyes. Implicit in the ACGB's negligence is the desire for the company to die out and cease to be a problem, something that Cherub refused to do. The ACGB viewed Cherub as a problem, but instead of taking any responsibility for solving it, the staff believed that by ignoring the problem that it would go away.

Unlike the ACGB's staff, the newspaper critics who reviewed Cherub's shows in the 1980s were generally positive and much more open-minded. Two critics in particular were supporters of Cherub from their earliest shows: B.A. Young of the *Financial Times*

and Francis King of the *Telegraph*. Young (1912-2001) was 11 years older than King (1923-2011), and both had come to theatre criticism rather late in life. Both reviewers had similar backgrounds which likely contributed to their praise: they both had spent significant time overseas as young men, and though both were from an older generation, their personal lives and attitudes toward art reflect, in certain ways, Cherub's ethos.

Young had served in the military as a young man, spending several years posted in Africa, before coming to join the staff of the magazine *Punch* and eventually the *Financial Times*, where he held the post of drama critic from 1964-1980. In his military days he had written several radio plays, and in addition to his criticism, wrote several books, both fiction and non-fiction. Though his criticism was generally mild, he found much of the theatre after 1968 distasteful. As his obituary in the *Daily Telegraph* said, Young was "never quite convinced that the abolition of censorship had been wholly advantageous"[33] and the *Guardian*'s obituary noted that in his book *The Mirror Up to Nature*, Young wrote, jokingly, that "the plot [of the next play he reviews] will be concerned with some liberal call for reform such as you read about in the *Guardian* newspaper. No scene will last longer than two minutes because the author has learnt to write by watching television."[34] His personal life was, even in the obituaries at the time of his death in 2001, somewhat obscured, though the *Times* noted that he was friends with Sir John Gielgud and Terrence Rattigan and "a confirmed bachelor"[35] and the *Independent* recorded that when he went to review a play he was "usually accompanied by one of several personable but remarkably interchangeable fair-haired youths,"[36] both obvious code for his being gay.

King was far more open about his homosexuality, at least once it was culturally

permissible for him to be so. His autobiography and several of his only slightly veiled novels attest to this fact. He had been born in Switzerland but lived his first nine years in India where his father was stationed. He joined the British Council after Oxford, and served in several overseas posts, the longest being in Greece and Japan. While in Japan, he completed several novels and had a long-term relationship with his male chauffeur. After returning to England, he continued writing novels, becoming the *Sunday Telegraph*'s theatre critic in 1978 and holding the post for ten years. The *Telegraph* recalled in its obituary of King that in his novels he showed "a recurring fascination with the louche and the bizarre"[37] and the *Guardian* said that "though [he was] a strong supporter of the Conservative party, he held some radical views, not least relating to his sexuality."[38]

Both Young and King praised Cherub's productions, and Young went as far as writing a letter on the company's behalf in their campaign for subsidy with the ACGB. That they supported Cherub is perhaps somewhat surprising when compared with the somewhat conservative or at least old-school views they demonstrated in their other reviews. Cherub was liked by these older critics, but disliked by the younger staff and panelists at the ACGB, many of whom were similar in age to Cherub's staff and actors. Why? I shall never know for certain, as they've both since died, but their support, in part, may have derived from their experiences living abroad as well as a similar sense of being "outsiders." Even though they were national critics, their sexuality placed them at a remove from society: Young could never officially admit his, and though King had experienced a tolerant attitude while in Japan, he did not find similar support in the UK until late in his life. Though their homosexuality was perhaps an open secret, it certainly

never appeared overtly in their columns. They may have felt a kinship with Visnevski, who is also gay, which led to their acceptance of the company's productions.

I tread carefully on this path because one should not assume that Cherub's productions were intended to be "gay" in a political sense. Unlike Gay Sweatshop, Cherub did not seek to promote gay rights with its productions, regardless of how individual members may have felt about the issue. Gay Sweatshop existed to produce plays that sought the acceptance of gays and lesbians, a worthy and necessary project, but not one that Visnevski wished to pursue with Cherub. Cherub's shows did feature a lot of nudity, both male and female, but rarely was it used in an overtly sexual or erotic way. Generally, nudity indicated a baring of the soul or it was done as humiliation or torture (as in *THE TRIAL* where K is made to change his suit or in *Macbeth* where the witches torture Macbeth when he is wearing only a loincloth). None of their plays was even specifically about homosexuality, though certain gender and sexuality issues can be parsed out of their work, particularly in the all-male *Two Noble Kinsmen* and the reframing of Viola/Sebastian in *Twelfth Night.* Certainly those themes were picked up by critics and audiences of those productions (especially by the female audiences for *Twelfth Night* in the Middle East).

Even the ACGB made note, though I doubt that (beyond Jon Plowman's report) the ACGB viewing Cherub as "gay" would have had any detrimental impact. In fact, the reverse may be true. After *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Visnevski said that Jonathan Lamede asked him if Cherub was a "gay" company. Visnevski was offended at the question, because he said he felt like his personal life was none of the ACGB's business. He didn't associate his Cherub work with his own homosexuality. If he'd said yes, what might that

have meant for the company's funding prospects? Gay Sweatshop received ACGB funding because it had a specifically political mission, as did other "niche" groups (a term which reflects the ACGB's attitude to such companies) like Women's Theatre Group and later the British-Asian company Tara Arts and other Black companies. The ACGB saw fit to fund these companies as part of demonstrating their ability to be inclusive, especially as devolution became increasingly unavoidable in the '80s. But Cherub did not wish to be "political" and to play only to a specific demographic community; Visnevski wanted the company's work to have a wide appeal. He rejected the label "gay" for his company because he felt it did not match his company's mission, which he never viewed as a political one.

However, he failed to substitute a new label, and for a system which depended so heavily on classification, that was a problem. The ACGB tried numerous times to put Cherub in a box, and because the staff did not sympathize with Visnevski's mission and could not associate the company within the conventional designations (political, mime, classical, etc.), they saw Cherub as a problem. As Plowman's report on *Two Noble Kinsmen* makes clear, when the ACGB's staff was left to draw its own conclusions, these reviewers often imagined the worst. Visnevski's desire to place his audience at a remove so that they could both admire the production but not become engrossed in it, allowing an intellectual engagement, seems to have worked to some degree. But because what the audience was being asked to consider was not strictly political, the ACGB could not place the company into one of its categories. They because they could not both fund the company and keep it marginalized (as it tended to do with other "token" companies), they opted to ignore the company's need for funding in the hope that Cherub would just go

away.

On its side, Cherub's biggest fault was that it didn't play by the ACGB's rules, and its desire to be contrary undoubtedly showed up in its work. The company's determination to be different was what drew King and Young to their productions as it at the same time alienated the ACGB. The elder critics were established within the field and didn't feel particularly threatened by Cherub's productions. Also, given that both of them had spent a significant amount of time living abroad, they appreciated Cherub's worldliness in the selection of its repertoire. Young, in particular, complimented Cherub on bringing forward plays that were rarely done. He offered his "pinprick of reproach" to the national companies for ignoring Spanish Golden Age drama in his review of Cherub's *Life is a Dream*, and for *Barabbas*, he noted "[de Ghelderode's] highly individual voice was seldom heard in this country…[and Cherub] gives a welcome taste of his quality."[39] For King and Young, and a whole host of others in the 1980s, Cherub's internationalism was not a problem, and in fact, likely contributed to their appreciation of the company.

Another problem for the ACGB in attempting to define Cherub was its built-in hybridity: that Cherub featured a foreign-born director working in Britain with European techniques was different than the hybridity of other European-inspired companies. In support of documenting companies like Complicité, featuring British artists practicing in Britain with foreign techniques, Harvie writes that

> by celebrating individual creativity, seeking isolation, indulging anti-theatricalism, and maintaining a hostility to theory, dominant British theatre culture resists collaborative practices, healthy miscegenation, and a recognition of creativity as labour, material practice and intellectual practice.[40]

Harvie's examples only demonstrate a look at "healthy miscengenation" from the perspective of British artists using foreign/European techniques in their work in Britain.

Complicité's core company members all trained with Lecoq in Paris, bringing with them their own interpretations of his methods for mime and physical theatre. But unlike the Complicité artists, Visnevski is not British, no matter how much time he spent in the UK both as child and adult. His classification as "stylistically incompatible" during his second year at Central is particularly telling, and though he made some adaptations to work in British theatre, he has never been (nor will ever be) fully British. The companies Harvie describes are home-grown British companies with British artists using foreign methods. When looking at Visnevski and Cherub, one must go a step further to also consider the impact of a foreign practitioner working in the British cultural field in addition to that of Britons utilizing foreign practice in their own country.

In Chapter II, I explored the unease that some people in Britain have with certain Eastern European cultural products. That Cherub has remained marginalized makes difficult any comparison with most other examples of what Harvie might call British theatre's tendency toward "isolation" and "anti-theatricality." Dan Rebellato offers some additional examples in his discussion of the development of the Royal Court in *1956 and All That*. Cherub did not ever pervade the British landscape in the way that the Royal Court has, but I think the more critical point is in fact that it was not able to do so. I've pointed the finger at the ACGB's staff for this, and given the reports I've viewed, I think that they deliberately made choices which led to Cherub's exclusion. Exploring the means by which cultural agents contained potential miscegenation allows me to mark a different type of historiographical problem than Harvie does. Where she is concerned about the exclusion of "culturally relevant" artists from the historical record, she ignores the way a company is considered culturally relevant in the first place. Cherub was never

culturally relevant because its particular type of hybridity prevented it from being legitimized by the ACGB and hence the rest of the British cultural field.

Further, and critically, not much has changed in this regard. Certainly, physical and non-text based theatre (inspired by continental techniques) has become commonplace in Britain. But, famous foreign artists (especially directors) permanently working in Britain are relatively rare, and beyond the Gate Theatre's emphasis on producing new foreign (non-American) plays and a few special seasons of European drama at the National or the RSC, the production of foreign plays is also rare. By far, a cursory examination of any British newspaper or *Time Out* magazine would demonstrate that the most commonly produced plays throughout the UK are those written by white British writers (even if one were to exclude productions of Shakespeare from the list), though this more recently has included the work of Black and Asian British playwrights like debbie tucker green, Tanika Gupta or Kwame Kwei-Armah. British theatre remains strongly resistant to cultural influences which are not practiced specifically by British artists. Directors like Bijan Sheibani,[‡‡] Jatinder Verma[§§] and Helena Kaut-Howson[***] have all had some mainstream success, but none are household names like Peter Hall or Trevor Nunn, despite having lived and worked in Britain for many years.

In part, Visnevski's theatre tended to deal with people in extremis: Segismundo in *Life is a Dream*, the Kinsmen, Emilia and the Jailer's Daughter in *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Judas, Jesus and Barrabas in *Barrabas*, Joseph K in *THE TRIAL*, Macbeth, Viola in

[‡‡] Iranian; former artistic director of Actors Touring Company; has directed at both the National and the Royal Court.

[§§] Indian-Kenyan; artistic director of Tara Arts, the first British-Asian theatre company. A brief discussion of Verma as the first Asian director to direct a play at the National can be found in Chapter II.

[***] Polish; former artistic director of Theatr Clwyd in Wales.

Twelfth Night, the list goes on and on. The productions were created to allow the audience a connection with these people and to bring out their stories in a visual and engaging way, bringing the audience face to face with these characters where they are, even if that may be at a low place. The British don't generally conceive of themselves as embattled, though Visnevski had lived that experience and brought it with him into his productions. That the audience and certain newspaper critics could sympathize with that position and that the ACGB's staff could not is especially telling. The subversiveness that the raw, visual presentation brought out in Cherub's productions of Shakespeare in particular was not something Plowman and Lamede and their ilk found acceptable. These (comparatively) young staff members and drama panelists perhaps saw "weakness" in Cherub's work, and as Harvie, citing Jonas Barish's work on antitheatricality, points out:

> a suspicion of physical movement [onstage] corresponds to a resistance to ontological and moral change…because it draws attention to the moral and ontological conservatism at the heart of anti-theatrical prejudice, and it shows up the fundamental conservatism of claims that British theatre continuously reproduces itself in its own literary image.[41]

Where the older theatre critics were not threatened by Cherub, the possibility that its new style might take root disturbed the younger ACGB staff. They had adopted the ACGB's mindset that they were the arbiters of culture, and for fairly young people, many of whom had not yet experienced personal success as practitioners, felt that their newly-won position was being destabilized. They could not fit Cherub into their own theatrical worldview, and so they wished to eradicate Cherub, and their success, as I've demonstrated, was nearly total.

Cherub's success, on the other hand, is in the eye of the beholder. Since

importance is rooted in notions of conventional success, Cherub has not previously been deemed important. Certainly, the company did not develop into a theatrical powerhouse like Cheek by Jowl or Complicité. Visnevski has never been asked to direct at the RSC, the Royal Court or the National (nor at any regional theatre, for that matter, though he has directed numerous productions abroad for other companies). Neither he nor any other member of the Cherub Company ever became rich or famous directly as a result of their work with Cherub. So in conventional terms, Cherub is not successful. And yet, as I've shown, if one looks at Cherub genealogically, we cannot even begin to calculate the company's success, and perhaps that makes "success" a meaningless determining factor in importance. They should be seen as important because they managed to create 36 productions over 25 years without government subsidy and because Visnevski and other members of the company have since entered the theatrical mainstream. The company's shows were seen in England, Scotland and abroad; we cannot calculate who saw their productions and what impact these might have had. We cannot estimate how the company's practices have spread through the continued work of the various company members as they've moved from institution to institution within the cultural field. Being conventionally "unsuccessful" does not comfortably result in Cherub not being important.

Coda

In 2009, I directed a production of Doug Wright's short play *Wildwood Park*. The play features two actors and is set in an empty mansion where a crime has taken place. Wright specifies that "the stage is bare. The architecture, furnishings and the

props of the play are all invisible, and indicated by the actors through gesture."[42] In the play, the actors are supposed to travel through the house as one character (the real estate agent) escorts the other (the putative client). My production took place on a small stage at the University of Oregon, and the space offered too little area for the actors to cross the stage in order to be in a different "room" of the house. The staging we (the actors and I) settled upon was for the actors to exit and re-enter the same stage space, re-creating it upon each re-entry as a new room. This technique was quite effective, and I remember receiving many compliments on this solution to the production's central problem. Upon recreating Cherub's production of *Kafka's THE TRIAL* over the past year, I recognized a similar use of stage space with the small door and a room of consisting of a painted outline on the floor containing three boxes which could be rearranged by the actors to create different rooms for the action. Though I was aware of *THE TRIAL* in 2009, I'm not sure that I can say with certainty that I took my staging from Cherub's production. What I am sure of, though, is that the way the actors and I chose to solve the problem was based in simplicity and efficiency. We embraced the limitations presented by the script and by the theatre, and developed a solution which addressed both. I am certain that I took that from Andrew Visnevski and his work with Cherub, and it is this influential idea that I will pass on to everyone (student, colleague, professional actor, designer) with whom I come in contact. I hope that in 50 years or 100 years, someone sees fit to trace that theatrical concept genealogically through the students of my students to once again find Visnevski and Grotowski and those from whom he inherited the idea. May my work only be one small part of a larger reconsideration of influence.

Notes

[1] Chris Gunning, "On the Receiving End," *unfetter'd: The Cherub Company London Newsletter*, Spring 1999, 3.

[2] Visnevski, interview, August 17, 2005.

[3] Visnevski, personal interview with author, August 11, 2005.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Andrew Visnevski, "The Cherub Company London – and a sense of Europe," outline for unrealized dissertation project, 2002.

[7] Paul Taylor, "The higher the platforms, the harder the fall," review of *Edward II* by Cherub Company, *The Independent*, January 9, 1999, 13.

[8] Visnevski, interview, August 11, 2005.

[9] John Willett, *The Theatre of Bertolt Brecht* (London: Methuen Drama, 1959), 179.

[10] Visnevski, interview, August 11, 2005.

[11] Paul Downey, "The Life of Edward the Second of England," review of *Edward II* by Cherub Company, *The Stage*, November 15, 1998, 15.

[12] Nick Curtis, "The King, in his Gold Skirt and Platform Boots, is Dead," review of *Edward II* by Cherub Company, *Evening Standard*, January 7, 1999.

[13] Ralph Koltai, "King is far from dead," *Evening Standard*, January 12, 1999.

[14] Disley Jones, "King is far from dead," *Evening Standard*, January 12, 1999.

[15] *Prospectus 2012*, Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. http://www.rada.ac.uk, (accessed March 20, 2012) 21.

[16] Hegarty, interview.

[17] *Prospectus 2012*, 18.

[18] Wise, interview.

[19] Hegarty, interview.

[20] Jeff Lewis, personal interview with author, Dec. 14, 2010.

[21] Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture,* trans. Richard Nice (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 24.

[22] Ben Francombe, "Falling Off a Wall: Degrees of Change in British Actor Training," *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 21, no. 3 (2001), 176.

[23] Visnevski, interview, Dec. 16, 2010.

[24] "Business and the Arts: A special report by Antony Thorncroft," [ACGB] *Annual Report 1988/89,* as quoted in Dorney, "Touring the Regional Repertoire," 116. (see chap. IV, note 63)

[25] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 128. (see chap. I, note 38).

[26] "About Us: History," *Trestle*, www.trestle.org.uk (accessed March 1, 2012).

[27] Dominic Shellard, *British Thatre Since the War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 20.

[28] Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: A Practical and Theoretical Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1994), 4.

[29] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 115.

[30] Ibid, 127.

[31] Ibid, 119.

[32] Dorney, "Touring the Regional Repertoire," 113.

[33] "B.A. 'Freddie' Young, Influential Theatre Critic for the *Financial Times*," *Daily Telegraph,* Sept. 19, 2001, 27.

[34] Eric Shorter, "B.A. Young, Graceful Critic Who Observed British Theatre for Nearly 40 Years," *Guardian*, Sept. 19, 2001.

[35] "B.A. Young," *Times*, Sept. 19, 2001.

[36] Alan Strachan, "Obituary: B.A. Young," *Independent,* Sept 28, 2001, 6.

[37] "Obituaries: Francis King," *Daily Telegraph,* July 6, 2011, 25.

[38] Ion Trewin, "Francis King obituary," *Guardian*, July 3, 2011.

[39] B.A. Young, "Young Vic Studio: *Barabbas*," review of *Barabbas* by Cherub Company, *Financial Times*, May 9 1980.

[40] Harvie, *Staging the UK*, 119.

[41] Ibid 118.

[42] Doug Wright, "Wildwood Park," *Unwrap Your Candy: An Evening of One-Act Plays* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2002), 30.

APPENDIX A

CHERUB COMPANY PRODUCTION TIMELINE, 1978-1989

1978 – *Life is a Dream* by Pedro Calderon de la Barca
Dec. 11-20, 1978 – Theatre Space, Covent Garden
Feb. 27/28 and March 1, 1979 – Action Space
March 12-17, 1979 at Young Vic Studio

1979 – *Two Noble Kinsmen* by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher
August 27-Sept. 8, 1979, Edinburgh Festival Fringe – University Chaplaincy Centre, Bristo Street
Early November? – The Head Theatre, Putney High Street, London
Nov. 15-17, 1979 – Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent, Canterbury
November 21-24, 1979; Nov. 28-Dec. 1, Dec. 5-8, 1979 – Young Vic
June 26-28, 1980 – Kammertheater Stuttgart – Stuttgarter Theatersommer '80
Aug. 6-10, 1980 – Buxton – Opera House Festival – Pavilion Gardens

1980 – *Barrabas* by Michel de Ghelderode
March-April, 1980 – Easter tour of London churches
March 14-15, 1980 – St. Leonard's Church, Streatham
March 19-20, 1980 – All Saint's Parish Church, Kinston, Surrey
March 21-22, 1980 – St. Mary's Church, North Finchley, London
March 28-29, 1980 – St. Philip's Church, Battersea, London
April 1, 1980 – Southwark Cathedral, London Bridge
April 2, 1980 – St. Giles Church, Cripplegate
May 2-24, 1980 – Young Vic Studio

1980 – *Romeo and Juliet* by Shakespeare (directed by Roger Michel)
Sept. 19-Nov. 7, 1980 – National Tour
October 2-4, 1980 – The Nell Gwynne Theatre, Hereford
October 9-10, 1980 – Norwich Arts Centre, Norwich – performed with *Donkey Work*
October 17-18, 1980 – Cricklade College, Andover – performed with *Donkey Work*
October 25, 1980 – Athenaeum Arts Centre, Warminster
October 13, 20 and 22, 1980 – Young Vic – played during run of *The Trial* in the Young Vic's Studio

1980 – *Donkey Work*, written and directed by Bernard Goss
May 2-24, 1980 – Young Vic Studio (in rep with *Monster Man*)
November 17-19, 1980 – Waltham Forest Schools (6 performances at various schools)
August 5-8, 1981 – Buxton Festival (toured with *Chaste Maid* and *The Trial*)
August 22-29, 1981 – Edinburgh, St. Margaret's School

1980 – *Monster Man*, written and directed by Goss

May 2-24, 1980 – Young Vic Studio (in rep with *Donkey Work*)

1980 – *Kafka's The Trial*, adapted by Andrew Visnevski, based on the novel by Franz Kafka

August 18-23/26?,1980 – Edinburgh
Sept. 8-27, 1980 – Young Vic Studio
Nov. 7-8, 1980 – Young Vic
January 13-7, 1981 – Young Vic (main), London
March-April 1981 – National tour
- March 4 – Merlin Theatre, Frome, Somerset
- March 6-7 – Jackson's Lane Community Centre, Archway/Highgate, London
- March 10 – Rugby College, Rugby
- March 12 – Christs Hospital, Horsham
- March 13 – Stahl Theatre, Peterborough
- March 16-7 – Shaftesbury Hall, Cheltenham
- March 19 – College of SE Arts Society, Northampton
- March 20-21 – South Hill Park, Bracknell
- March 26-8 – Derby Playhouse Studio, Derby
- March 30-April 4, 1981 – Crucible Studio, Sheffield
- April 7-8, 1981 – Old Town Hall, Hemel Hempstead
- April 9 – Civic Centre, Berkhampstead
- April 11 – Dovecot Arts Centre, Stockton-on-Tees
- April 24-5 - Nonington College, Dover

July 8-18, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club (in rep with *Chaste Maid*)
August 5-8, 1981 – Buxton Festival (in rep with *Chaste Maid*)
Aug. 17-29, 1981 – Edinburgh, St. Margaret's School
Oct. 6-19, 1981 – British Council tour Netherlands
- Oct. 6 – Theatre Achterom, Breda, Neth.
- Oct. 8 – Stadsschowburg, Utrecht, Neth.
- Oct. 10 – Kleine Zaal, Schouwburg, Arnhem, Neth.
- Oct. 11 – Cultureel Centrum De Vest, Alkmaar, Neth.
- Oct. 12 – Stadsschouwburg, Eindhoven, Neth.
- Oct. 13 – De Muzeval – Emmen, Neth.
- Oct. 15 – Cultureel Centrum De Beejekurf, Venray, Neth.

Oct. 19 – Le Festival du Jeune Theatre, Liege, Belgium
Feb 9-13, 1982 – British Council tour Belgium
- Feb. 9 – Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels
- Feb. 10 – Strombeek-Bever Cultural Centre, Brussels (suburb)
- Feb. 11 – Gent (PROKA)
- Feb. 12 – Leuven (t'Stuck)
- Feb. 13 – Turnhout Cultural Centre

May 1-6, 1982 – Tel Aviv Festival, Israel (toured with *Macbeth*)
May 17, 1982 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre, Fareham (toured with

Macbeth)

1981 – *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* by Thomas Middleton

February 9-14, 1981 – Theatre Space, London
February 16-28, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club, London
April-June, 1981 – National tour
April 28-9 – Oxford Playhouse, Oxford
April 30 – Rotherham Arts Center, South Yorks
May 1 – The Civic Centre, Slaithwaite
May 15-6 – Queen Mary's College, Basingstoke, Hampshire
May 19 – Rugby School
May 20-1 – The Theatre, Chipping Norton
May 22 – The Drama Center, New Milton
May 23 – Medina Community Centre, Isle of Wight
May 28 – St. Edmund's Arts Center, Salisbury
May 29-30 – Wells Centre, Wells-next-to-Sea, Norfolk
June 3 – Arts Centre, The Leas, Folkestone
June 5 – Athenaeum Arts Centre, Warminster
June 6 – Fareham and Gossport Drama Centre
June 8-11 – Leeds Playhouse, Leeds
June 12-13 – Old Town Hall Arts Centre, Hemel Hempstead
June 18 – Strode Theatre, Street, Somerset
June 19 – Stahl Theatre, Oundle
June 20 – Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton
June 24-27, 1981 – Bern, Switzerland – Internationals Festival Kleiner Buehnen
June 29-July 7, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club (in rep with *The Trial*)
August 5-8, 1981 – Buxton Festival (in rep with *The Trial*)

1981 – *Macbeth* by Shakespeare

August 15-29, 1981 – Edinburgh
November 2-December 19, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club (in rep with *Journal of the Plague Year)*
Feb.-April 1982 – National Tour
Feb. 26-7 1982 – The Theatre, Uppingham
March 1-6 – Arts Centre, University of Warwick, Coventry
March 8-9 – Fermcy Centre, King's Lynn
March 10 – Cressex School, High Wycombe
March 11 – Arts Centre, Christ's Hospital, Horsham
March 12-3 – South Hill Park, Bracknell
March 15-6 – Merlin Theatre, Frome
March 17-8 – Medina Community Centre, Newport, Isle of Wight
March 20 – Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton
March 22 – Strode Theatre, Street
March 23 – Queen Mary's College, Basingstoke
March 24-5 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre, Fareham
March 26 – West End Centre, Aldershot

March 27 – Tamworth Arts Centre, Tamworth
March 30-1 – The Theatre, Chipping Norton
April 1-2 – Nell Gwynne Theatre, Hereford
April 3 – Oswestry School, Wrexham
April 5-6 – Arts Centre, Shrewsbury
April 15 – St. Edmunds's Arts Centre, Salisbury
April 16-7 – Old Town Hall Arts Centre, Hemel Hempstead
April 19-20 – Quay Theatre, Sudbury
April 22-4 – Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury
April 26 – Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich
April 27-8 – Stahl Theatre, Oundle

May 7-9, 1982 – Tel Aviv Festival, Israel (toured with *The Trial*)
May 18 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre, Fareham (toured with *The Trial*)
May 20 – Kidderminster College of Further Education
May 21 – Lichfield Arts Centre
May 22 – Rugby School
Sept. 29-Oct. 25, 1983 – Upstream Theatre Club, London (re-mounted by Tom Hunsinger after the original production)

1981 – *A Journal of the Plague Year* by Peter Fincham, based on an account by Daniel Defoe

November 2-December 19, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club (in rep with *Macbeth*) (letter)

1981– *Ozzie and the Secret Forest* by Angela Lanyon (directed by Ben Ormerod)

February 21, 28, March 7, 14, 21, 28, 1981 – Upstream Theatre Club, London

1981 – *Poets are People,* Poems/text compiled by Vi Marriott (directed by Anthony Best)

March 12, 1981 – Stanley Park High School, Carshalton, Surrey
March 16, 1981 – Notre Dame School, London
March 30, 1981 – Hertfordshire and Essex High School, Bishops Stortford
April 6, 1981 – Ewell High School, West Ewell, Surrey

1982 – *Coming Ashore in Guadeloupe* by John Spurling

Aug. 7, 9-10, 1982 – Harrogate Festival
Aug. 15-28, 1982 – Assembly Rooms, Edinburgh Festival Fringe
Nov. 2-Dec. 11, 1982 – Upstream Theatre Club, London (in rep w/ *Twelfth Night*)
Feb. 25-May 28, 1983 – National Tour (toured with *Twelfth Night*)
April 13 – Shrewsbury
April 23 – Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton
April 27 – Madeley Court School, Telford
April 28 – The Theatre, Chipping Norton
May 17-21 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre (with *Coming Ashore*)

1982 – *Twelfth Night* by Shakespeare

Oct. 8-Dec. 18, 1982 – Upstream Theatre Club, London (in rep w/ *Coming Ashore*)
Feb. 25-May 28, 1983 - National Tour (toured with *Coming Ashore*)
- Feb. 25-6 – Uppingham School, Rutland
- March 4 – Christ's Hospital, Horsham
- March 7-8 – Fermoy Centre, Kings' Lynn
- March 14 – Arts Centre, Rotherham
- March 16 – Ampleforth Abbey
- March 18-9 – Quay Theatre, Sudbury
- April 7 – Polish Cultural and Social Association, London
- April 8-9 – Old Town hall, Hemel Hempstead
- April 12 – Shrewsbury
- April 15 – Arts Centre, Lichfield
- April 16 – Arts Centre, Tamworth
- April 25-6 – Madeley Court School, Telford
- April 29 – The Theatre, Chipping Norton
- April 30 – Arts Centre, Leighton Buzzard
- May 3 – Heronswood Park, Kidderminster
- May 4-5 – Wolverhampton Polytechnic
- May 9 – Bedford School
- May 11 – Strode Theatre, Street
- May 13 – Queen Mary's College, Basingstoke
- May 14 – Drama Centre, New Milton
- May 17-21 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre (with *Coming Ashore*)
- May 28 – Fakenham Festival

Jan. 16-21, 1984 – Upstream Theatre Club, London
January-February, 1984 – British Council tour to Holland/Germany/Belgium
- Jan. 24 – Breda, Netherlands
- Jan. 25-6 – Utrecht, Netherlands
- Jan. 27 – Spijkenisse, Netherlands
- Jan. 28 – Eindhoven, Netherlands
- Jan. 29 – Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Jan. 31 – Dordrecht, Netherlands
- Feb. 1 – Tilburg, Netherlands
- Feb. 2 – 's-Hertogenbosch, Netherlands
- Feb. 3 – Haarlem, Netherlands
- Feb. 5 – Almere, Netherlands
- Feb. 6 – Cologne, Germany
- Feb. 8 – Maastricht, Netherlands
- Feb. 10-1 – Munich, Germany
- Feb. 13 – Turnhout, Belgium
- Feb. 14 – Ghent, Belgium
- Feb. 15 – Heusden-Zolder, Belgium

Nov.-Dec., 1984 – British Council tour to Egypt
- Nov. 27-8 – Goumhouria Theatre, Cairo
- Nov. 30 – Sayed Darwesh Theatre, Alexandria

September, 1987 – British Council tour of Spain
Sept. 7-10 – Almagro Festival
Sept. 11-13 – Madrid
Nov.- Dec. 1988 – British Council to Iraq (and Pakistan with *The Old Country*)
Nov. 7-8 – Saddam Theatre, Mosul University, Mosul
Nov. 12 – Town Theatre, Basrah, Iraq
Nov. 14-15 – Rasheed Theatre, Baghdad
Nov. 21-23 – Islamabad
Nov. 26-7 – Peshawar
Nov. 30-Dec. 1 – Lahore
Dec. 7 – Karachi
May 1989 – British Council tour to Ethiopia, Sudan and Zimbabwe
May 3-5 – City Hall Theatre, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
May 10 – Sudan Club, Khartoum, Sudan
May 13-14 – Friendship Hall Theatre, Khartoum
May 17 – Harare, Zimbabwe
May 19 – Gweru, Zimbabwe
May 21 – Masvingo, Zimbabwe

1983 – *Cyrano de Bergerac* by Edmond Rostand
January 1-22, 1983 – Upstream Theatre Club, London

1983 – *Unicorn Unchained* by Kate Vandegrift
Sept. 22-Oct. 15, 1983 – Upstream Theatre Club, London (double bill with *Gold Sarcophagus*)

1983 – *The Gold Sarcophagus* by Roxanne Shafer
Sept. 22-Oct. 15, 1983 – Upstream Theatre Club, London (double bill with *Unicorn Unchained*)

1983 – *Hamlet* by Shakespeare
Nov. 3-Dec 22, 1983 – Upstream Theatre Club, London
April-June, 1984 – National tour
April 2 – New Milton
April 3-4 - Havant
April 9-10 – Hereford
April 11 – Shrewsbury
April 12 – Kidderminster
April 13 – Lichfield
April 14 – Tamworth
April 19 – Rugby
April 26 – Aldershot
April 27 – Horsham
May 2-5 – Fareham
May 7-9 – King's Lynn
May 10-12 – Wells-next-the-Sea

May 14 – Ipswich
May 15-6 – UOEA Norwich
May 17-9 – Sudbury
May 24-6 – Norwich
June 7-9 – Lowestoft
June 11-12 – Ampleforth
June 14-15 – Chipping Norton
June 16 - Warminster

1984 – *As You Like It* by Shakespeare
Aug. 12-25, 1984 – Cannongate Lodge, Edinburgh
Sept. 23, 1984 – Crouch End Arts Festival
Sept. 26-Oct. 27, 1984 – Upstream Theatre Club, London
March 22-3, 1985 – Old Town Hall Centre, Hemel Hempstead
March 27, 1985 – Badisches Staatstheater Karlsruhe, West Germany

1985 – *Come the Revolution* by Shafer
Jan.9-26, 1985 – Upstream Theatre Club, London

1985 – *Kafka's THE CASTLE*, adapted by Visnevski, based on the novel by Franz Kafka
Aug. 25-31, 1985 – George Square Theatre, Edinburgh
Sept. 9-28, 1985 – St. George's Theatre, Tufnell Park
Oct. 1985 – National tour
Oct. 15-6, 1985 – Fareham and Gosport Drama Centre
Oct. 18, 1985 – Uppingham Theatre, Uppingham
Oct. 24, 1985 – Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury
Oct. 25-6, 1985 – Old Town Hall Arts Centre, Hemel Hempstead

1986 – *Kafka's THE TRIAL* (Opera), composed by Stephen Edwards, libretto by Lynne Williams and Andrew Visnevski
Aug. 17-21, 1986 – Dartington International Summer School, Totnes, Devon

1988 – *The Old Country* by Alan Bennett
Nov.-Dec. 1988 – British Council Tour to Pakistan (with *Twelfth Night*)
Nov. 20-23 – Islamabad
Nov. 29 – Lahore
Dec. 4-6 - Karachi

1989 – *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster
Oct. 30-Nov. 18, 1989 – St. George's Theatre, Tufnell Park, London

APPENDIX B

LIST OF ARCHIVAL MATERIALS

This dissertation has relied upon both published and unpublished materials found in four separate archives. Three are in London, United Kingdom: the Arts Council of Great Britain archive, housed in the V&A Theatre and Performance Archive; the British Council Archive, housed at the The National Archives at Kew; and the Cherub files in the collection of the British Council's headquarters. The fourth archive is Cherub's own, and includes the company's files from 1978-2003 as well as photographs, production materials and video recordings. The Cherub Archive is currently in the private collection of the author. This list reflects materials from those archives directly cited in the text.

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